

THE MARTYRDOM OF SAVONAROLA.

THE ANGELS OF SAVONAROLA

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Extract from a letter of Fra Girolamo to Fra Domenico, his dearest friend:

“All here are well, especially *our angels* (*nostri angeli*), who wish to be remembered. Keep well and pray for me. I wait your return with great eagerness.”

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PRELUDE

UPON the walls of many glorious churches and splendid palaces in the beautiful city of Florence are painted angel faces, outlined there hundreds of years ago by the hands of skillful and tender-hearted masters.

The saintly Fra Angelico, the sympathetic Botticelli drew some of these angels and breathed into them a holiness and a purity which later artists have been unable to equal.

Yet it is not of these that I want to tell you, but of a real human being—an Italian boy—who lived in Florence four hundred years ago, and who, because he gave much of help and comfort to a great soul that suffered there for the sin and shame of the city, was not unfitly called by him one of his “angels,” being indeed a little ministering spirit who brought succor and solace in a time of dire distress to one of God’s truest servants.

During the last decade of the fifteenth century that fair City of Flowers, full of riches and learning, crowded with stately buildings and dowered with wonderful art treasures, had nevertheless come to a sad period in her history.

Lorenzo de’ Medici, the Magnificent Lorenzo, as he was called, had so far usurped the power

in Florence that he had made himself into a sort of tyrant, by whose slightest whim the affairs of state were swayed.

Lorenzo was not, it is true, a wholly wicked man, or destitute of noble impulses. He was to a degree generous, and he had an intense admiration for the beautiful in letters and in art. But he cared little how the poor suffered, and he lived in a reckless, passionate way which doubtless brought him to his swift and early death at the age of forty-two years.

Though the rich men in Florence were numerous at this time, yet the poverty in some quarters of the city was great, and there seemed few to trouble themselves concerning those who succumbed in life's struggle either from want or sickness. Lorenzo and his gay companions feasted all night long in their richly-decorated palaces, and then went with drunken carousals through the streets while the dawn was breaking; only to spend the following day in bargaining over rare treasures of sculpture dug up from some ancient ruin, or in listening to the recital of the poems of some classic Greek master.

For them the religion of Jesus Christ seemed almost a thing despised and forgotten. It has even been said that some of these deluded Florentines suggested a return to the idolatry of the old Greek superstitions.

But God did not forget His people in Florence, even as He has never forgotten that remnant which remains to Him through all the ages. Still there existed a few noble souls in the city who watched and hoped for a turn in the tide—for something which would purify the mass of corruption and guide the people back to better ways.

Therefore our kind Heavenly Father sent at last a noble prophet and leader among them who accomplished a great work, and whose memory is perhaps more precious and more like that of the divine Master Himself than that of any religious teacher who has ever lived on earth.

This prophet's name was Fra Girolamo Savonarola, and I should like to sketch for you a few among the most wonderful pictures in his remarkable career as they were witnessed by the people of Florence, who loved him, and whom he loved with a passionate tenderness, but particularly as they were seen by one little lad who was very near to the great preacher's heart, and whom I have called one of the "Angels of Savonarola."

The Angels of Savonarola

I

UNDER THE ROSE TREE

ON a beautiful summer day in Florence during the year 1489 Guido Salviati sat before a magnificently carved oaken desk in his study, writing diligently.

Guido was a slender dark-eyed man of about middle-age. His intellectual face and nobly moulded brow showed him to be a student, while his carriage, at once haughty and graceful, spoke of his patrician ancestry.

The Salviati were, in truth, one of the oldest Florentine families, and distantly related to the Medici by a connection which dated several generations back. But they were not at all proud of the kinship, and Guido himself would have told you, had you questioned him on the subject, that the reigning family of Florence was to blame for much that was evil and dangerous in the affairs of the city's government.

Guido Salviati was naturally of a sweet and lovable temper, but his outlook upon the world had from earliest youth been rather a grave and sad one. He was inclined to take sombre views

of life and to see the gloomy side of a picture which included both shadow and light.

Perhaps this was partly because there had been much sorrow connected with his early childhood. His father had perished only a few months after his birth in one of those fierce political tumults which occasionally swept across the sky of civic life in Florence, bringing some of her best and noblest citizens to untimely deaths, and changing without warning the party in power to one of wholly diverse sentiments.

Guido's mother had brought him up with the hope that he might give his life to the Church and become a monk in one of the numerous orders then existing. She was an intensely religious woman, and if it had not been for the deep responsibility she felt in moulding the life of her little son, she would no doubt have retired immediately to a convent and taken the veil as soon as her young husband passed away.

But Guido Salviati, though he revered and respected his mother as she well deserved, and though in most things her slightest wish was law to him, could by no means bring his mind to resign the joys and the excitements of a career in this world, and would never consent even to think of entering upon the monkish existence.

That he had not cherished any such intention was the more fortunate, since when he was twenty

years old there came into his life that which was to be its greatest delight and its most wholesome inspiration. This was his love for a beautiful young cousin, Maria Valori, a fair and lovely woman, whose companionship would have made cheerful the saddest condition.

Maria was one of those blue-eyed and golden-haired Italian girls belonging to a type seldom seen, but whose beauty is perhaps the more charming for its rarity. She gave to Guido after their marriage all the tenderness and devotion of which her lofty soul was capable, and their affection was made richer and more unselfish when there came to them a little son, who inherited the fair skin and hair of his mother and the dark eyes of his father, and who was, at the time our story opens, a very beautiful boy about eight years old.

Guido Salvati dipped his pen once again into the polished silver ink-stand in front of him, but paused a moment to listen before placing it upon the paper.

Down the great stone stairway and through the echoing marble hall were coming childish footsteps.

They paused at the study-door, and a boy's voice called in ringing tones:

"Father, have you not almost finished your writing? You know you said I might go with you to-day to hear the Frate speak at the San Marco,

and I am all ready. See, father, I have put on my beautiful new velvet tunic and cap which mother embroidered for me in gold and silver thread! And nurse said I might wear the necklace of mosaics set in silver which you brought me the last time you went to Rome."

Guido Salviati rose and carefully arranged the pile of written sheets on his desk, then turned and held out both arms to his well-loved little boy.

"That is right, my Bernardino. You are quite a fine young man in your new costume, and I think your mother's skilled hands have indeed wrought a wonderful work of art in all those graceful patterns upon collar and sleeve. The mosaics are a little heavy for you to wear as yet, but since nurse thinks otherwise—well, we will let them adorn you for this one occasion.

"So I promised to take you to hear the Frate talk, did I? Now truly, Dino, do you think it is possible that such a very small and ignorant person as yourself could comprehend one single word of what that great man is to preach about?"

The pair made a striking picture as they stood in their rich dresses beneath the high window of stained glass through which the brilliant rays of the afternoon sun were streaming, the slender figure and dark, high-bred face of the father contrasting well with the fair, childish beauty of his golden-haired son.

"Why, father," Bernardino replied quickly, in a tone of slightly wounded dignity, "I am not such a very small boy any longer. You know I was eight years old on my last birthday, and some of the lads who belong to Fra Girolamo's class and who wear the beautiful white dresses are only twelve. I think I should like to wear a white dress when I am a little older, and become one of his 'angels,' as he calls them!"

Salviati's brow clouded, and he looked somewhat grave at the eager words. Great as was his admiration for Fra Girolamo Savonarola, the new Dominican friar who was influencing all Florence so mightily by his teaching during these last months, he yet had never overcome the intense abhorrence of the monastic vocation which had been one of the shadows that fell across his boyhood days.

The thought that his lovely, light-hearted son could ever become an inmate of the dark cells and tread the long cloisters in any monastery was exceedingly repugnant to him, and he said quickly, with an abrupt change of tone:

"No, indeed, my Bernardino, you are not to be a Dominican novice; you are to be a student like your father—to collect rare manuscripts, and copy and criticise them, to read the wonderful poems of the old Greek masters, and perhaps to unearth discoveries of classic treasures which will

render your name famous and make you a benefactor to humanity."

"I do not think that is being a great benefactor to people," said Dino sagely, while he watched his father take from a nail on the wall his velvet cap, with its curling plume, and a long silken coat which he threw about him. "Do you believe, father, that it really makes men any better to read old manuscripts or learn Greek poems? When I am grown up I will teach them to give money for feeding the poor, and to be more loving and more gentle towards one another. Mother says that is what the Frate shows us is best and right, and that it is the only way to make Florence a city that the Lord Jesus Christ would approve of!"

Guido Salviati looked at his son in some surprise, wondering what other unexpected thoughts might be maturing under that thatch of sunny hair.

Below his breath he murmured softly, "Verily, out of the mouths of babes we are taught," but aloud he only said, "Well, well, your mother has a pretty clear understanding of matters in general, Dino, so I am sure she has quoted our friend Fra Girolamo correctly."

By this time the two were in the street, walking with rapid steps towards the well-known convent of San Marco, whose historic walls were the goal of their expedition.

Meanwhile the boy, struggling hard to keep up with his father's longer footsteps, was talking breathlessly, his sentences put rapidly together.

"Father, what do you think the Frate will speak about to-day? Mother says that each time she has heard him it has been on some chapter of the Revelation, and he explains it all so beautifully, and puts entirely new ideas into her mind. I wish he would say something specially for the children to-day, something that I could understand and remember! Perhaps he will tell how the Lord Jesus loved little ones, and took them up in his arms and blessed them, as mother says he is doing in the beautiful picture she gave me for my birthday which hangs above my bed!"

The father had scarcely time to reply to this observation, for they had now reached the Convent of San Marco, and were entering the cloister garden, where quite a congregation had already gathered.

It was a glorious day in early summer, and Fra Girolamo had assembled his boys in the open square surrounded by the cloisters which the monks cultivated as their garden and which was filled with beautiful flowers.

The scene was a pleasing one, and imprinted itself firmly on the memory of little Bernardino. Many times later in life he had only to close his eyes to recall it vividly—the blue Italian sky, the

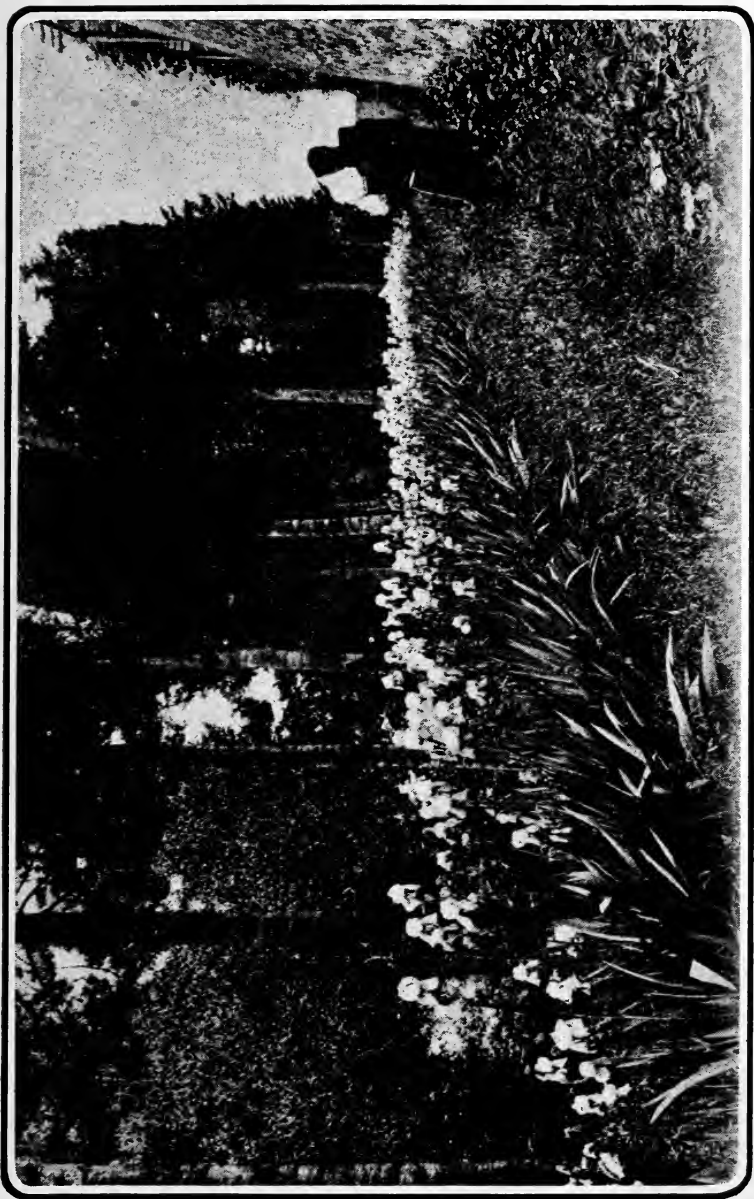
grey encompassing walls of the convent, the brilliant flowers, and the white dresses of the Dominican novices, who formed a semi-circle around their beloved teacher.

Savonarola himself was seated in a high-backed carved chair, which had been placed for him directly under the gigantic damask rose-tree growing in the centre of the garden.

The tree was in full bloom, its wealth of fragrant blossoms already beginning to scatter in a crimson shower on the ground beneath. As they fluttered down, so fair and fresh and radiant, they seemed in singular contrast to the dark figure whose head and shoulders they rested upon occasionally with an almost caressing touch.

Fra Girolamo was at this time just beginning the remarkable career that was to make him the most notable personage in Florentine history and one of the greatest men in the history of the world.

Bernardino, pulling hard upon his father's hand, strove eagerly to get near the front rank of white-robed boys, in order that he might see more clearly the wonderful friar of whom he had heard his mother talk so frequently during the past few weeks. This was not such an easy matter as it appeared, for the Frate's daily lecture to his classes had become the latest and most popular diversion of the Florentine courtiers.



"A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN."

Here was a man not afraid to say frankly whatever he thought upon any topic, and possessed of a mind at once versatile and profound, noble and sincere, who spoke with a peculiar eloquence and magnetism which captivated all his hearers. Often when he spoke of sin and its punishment, those flippant, careless men trembled, yet they went again and again to listen, because from his lips they were sure of hearing only the truth, stern though it might be.

Guido and Bernardino finally succeeded in establishing themselves well forward, for most of the men present knew the father, and smiling at the beautiful boy's eagerness, made way for the little fellow to occupy the place of observation which he seemed to desire so greatly. The Frate had just begun to speak as they entered, for it was already slightly past the hour for the lesson.

It chanced that the portion of Scripture which he had that day selected as the text for his theme was one of Isaiah's prophecies concerning Messiah. That wonderful fifty-third chapter of Isaiah he read in his deep, rich tones, or rather he recited it, for his marvellous mind had absorbed a great portion of the sacred volume, and it is said that he could quote from almost any part of the Bible at will: "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? He is despised and rejected of men, a

man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The talk which followed was one full of pathos and of inspiration. It was upon the sufferings of our Lord as portrayed so graphically by the poet-prophet centuries before, and upon the necessity for that tremendous and awful sacrifice which the sins of the race demanded.

"He suffered and died for us," the Frate cried, his voice rising until it filled the garden and the surrounding cloisters, "and shall we give Him nothing in return for the agony and grief which He so lavishly expended upon us unworthy sinners? Shall we remain here, comfortable and content in this magnificent city, delighting in the pleasures of art and the beauties of nature, enjoying rich food and elegant apparel, and forget the poor and sorrowful ones at our gates? Do you imagine, men of Florence, that you can be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ without bearing his cross after him? Do you think that you can be

like the divine Master unless you are willing to follow in his footsteps, to endure as he endured?"

The Frate paused a moment, and lifted his tender blue eyes to the blue sky with a rapture in them that reminded his hearers of the look which Stephen's face must have worn when he cried, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

"No," cried Savonarola, rising as he spoke, and stretching out his hands towards his hearers with an appealing gesture, "do not think that the way of the Cross is too hard, dear friends! It is the blessed way, the best way to walk through this thorny and difficult wilderness-world. It leads right on, over mountain and stream, straight to heaven's gate. And if it led through fire and flood, through bitter persecution, or even by the bloody entrance of the martyr's death, it is still the most secure road to travel in, the only safe path!"

The monk ceased with eyes uplifted, as if he already saw above him that martyr's crown which was indeed always in his estimation the highest honor to which one of God's saints could attain, and then bowing his head, he pronounced the Latin benediction, the signal for his class to disperse.

The white-robed boys now formed in procession, and marched away through the cloisters, chanting

as they went the one hundred and third Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

Little Bernardino thought it was the very sweetest singing he had ever heard, and he stood motionless, gazing intently after the choristers until they disappeared through the great door of the convent.

Fra Girolamo had seated himself again in the high-backed chair and was leaning his head upon his hand, as if wearied by the effort he had made.

Several of the men among his auditors, who were already full of admiration for him, and who afterwards formed that great Piagnone party which sought to purify and uplift Florence, lingered around him and waited in respectful silence till Savonarola should be ready to converse with them.

Among these was Bernardino's father, and the boy began to congratulate himself on the prospect which seemed to be so close before him, of actually approaching near the wonderful preacher.

At last the Frate raised his head slowly and looked kindly at his friends. Dino, who was just in front of him, saw a face singularly rugged and homely in outline and lacking in all pretension to beauty of feature, yet unusually attractive and impressive.

We, living four hundred years after his time,

still know quite well the appearance of Savonarola, from the sympathetic portrait which Fra Bartolommeo has left to posterity, and we may fancy that we can trace in its features a curious resemblance to the strong and roughly hewn countenance of that man in our own time and land who loved his fellows as deeply as did the Frate, and who as truly may be said to have given all he had—time and strength and heart—yes, even life itself, for them—Abraham Lincoln! Fra Girolamo's face could, indeed, be very stern and grave, as could that of Lincoln, when he contemplated wrong or injustice, but now as he looked down upon the child who stood before him it was full of a tender and sympathetic light which made its expression beautiful.

His blue eyes, sparkling and deepset, which his contemporaries were accustomed to describe as brimming with liquid fire, were now suffused with tears, for the monk could never through his whole life speak concerning the suffering and death of our dear Lord without being moved by the strongest emotion.

He held out his hand to Dino, saying pleasantly, "Ah, friend Guido, so this is the little son you promised to bring some day to see me. I am very glad to know you, my child, but I am afraid the lesson of to-day was a difficult one for you to comprehend. Had I realized that I was to have

so young an auditor, I should have tried to add some more suitable words, speaking concerning our Lord's love for little children and His readiness to have them come at all times to him."

"That is what I hoped you would talk about, Father!" cried Dino, taking courage, as he looked up eagerly into the benignant countenance. "That is like the story of the picture which mother gave me. It hangs above my bed, and I look at it every night when I am saying my prayers. It is the Lord Jesus, you know, talking to the children, with one boy on his knee and several standing beside him.

"But I did understand a great deal of what you said to-day, for it is the same Jesus you told of who suffered and died for us, and we could not have been happy and glad, as we are, if he had not saved us in that way, could we? Then you said we must follow him all the way, even if it was the way which leads to the cross, and that is what I should like to do, Father!"

The boy's beautiful face was lit up by an expression at once noble and very winsome, and the worldly courtiers gathered near glanced at one another in surprise, as if questioning what manner of child this might be. Fra Girolamo himself was deeply touched, and laying his hand caressingly on the boy's fair curls, said, "My little Bernardino, you and I shall be friends from this time

on, I am sure. You must ask your good parents to allow you to come often and see me, and sometimes you shall walk with me here in the garden, and we will talk together of these matters and others like them.

“Now I must not keep you any longer, for some of my friends are waiting to speak of important questions; but stay a moment, let me give you a token that we shall certainly meet again in friendship!”

So saying, the monk turned towards the great rose-tree under which he had been sitting, and lifting a slender hand, whose long tapering fingers were as delicate and finely formed as those of a woman, he gathered for the boy several of the glowing damask roses.

Then, as he gave them to Dino, he bent and kissed him gravely on the forehead, while the boy, almost overcome by gratitude at this unlooked-for favor, could only murmur tremulous thanks as his father led him away to make room for the crowd of Florentine nobles who were waiting with question and discussion until the friar should be at leisure.

Thus was begun that strong friendship between Bernardino and the Frate which was to grow and flourish during the eight years that followed, and which was to influence to a quite unexpected degree the lives of both.

II

AT THE CATHEDRAL

THE fame of the great Dominican preacher continued to grow steadily, not only in Florence but throughout the length and breadth of Italy, during the two years which followed Bernardino Salviati's first meeting with Fra Girolamo.

From Padua and Naples and Perugia, even from Rome itself, there came men and women who were curious to listen to the oratory which was said to be more wonderful than anything that the world had yet produced. Hungry souls there were also, who came in true desire to be fed with the bread of life which this earnest monk knew how to give his flock, not offering them a pretended food which was in reality only chaff.

Savonarola's sermons were full of gospel truth, for though he was in many respects thoroughly loyal to the Church of Rome, and was only Protestant in so far as every great and holy soul which *protests* against evil has always been Protestant, yet he held fast to all the simple cardinal truths of Scripture for which Luther and Calvin were later to make their great stand. He believed and preached the complete sufficiency of

Christ's sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and the perfect willingness of God to receive and hear the suppliant who comes in Jesus' name, without any intervention of or intercession by the saints.

He taught that no priestly absolution could be of any avail unless it was preceded by God's forgiveness, and that only by faith and submission could salvation come—not by virtue of outward works or penances. Also, he never hesitated to pour out fiery denunciations against the evils existing in the church and the vices of the clergy.

"The Church must be reformed before we can expect that the State will be!" Fra Girolamo was accustomed to exclaim. "You force me to take up the cry of Jeremiah against your sins, and if a change does not soon come over the present condition of God's people, he will visit them with terrible woes, even as he visited the children of Israel and Judah with ruin and devastation!"

The Frate's sermons brought such tremendous crowds to the convent church of San Marco that many had to be turned away, and he was finally persuaded to transfer the services to the larger building of the Cathedral.

Very early one morning in the late autumn of the year 1491 Bernardino Salviati might have been seen hurrying with his mother through the dimly-lighted streets of Florence towards the Duomo.

Both were warmly wrapped in fur cloaks, for the morning was chilly, and a slight, misty rain was making everything damp and unpleasant. In front of them walked two serving-men, carrying lighted torches, for it was still so early that the first faint streaks of dawn were only just beginning to show themselves in the east.

"Mother," said Bernardino, shivering a little even under his warm wrap in the damp air, "why would not father come with us this morning, though we begged him to do so?"

Maria Salviati sighed, and did not answer for a moment. Then she said, "I think, Dino, that your father is anxious about Fra Girolamo, and that is why he is unwilling to go and listen to him as he used to be so fond of doing. Your father loves our dear friend as much as we do, but lately he seems to feel very certain that the Frate will soon bring down upon himself some terrible punishment from the chief authorities of the church if he continues in his bold preaching. You know that only last week the Papal Legate was here and held several conversations with Savonarola. No one seems to be certain what was the result of them, but we may feel quite sure that our brave friar never acceded for a moment to any demands made by the Pope."

"Of course he would never do anything which he did not think right, mother dear," answered

Dino cheerily, quite undaunted by his mother's anxiety, which indeed he was too young to comprehend very clearly. "Our Frate knows far better than any one else, even bishop or Pope, the difference between right and wrong, and I do not see how any one in the world could have the right to stop his preaching or to tell him what he ought to say!"

Maria Salviati smiled a little at the boy's simplicity, but she sighed again the next moment as she remembered how soon his eyes might be opened by some startling event which would perhaps bring disastrous consequences upon his friend Fra Girolamo.

In the two years which had just passed Bernardino had grown rapidly, and was developing into a tall, symmetrical lad. He was now in his eleventh year, and showed signs of unusual maturity at that age, which made his parents sometimes very proud of him, and sometimes rather anxious as to what his future might be. "I am not quite sure, Father," Guido Salviati had said one day to Savonarola, as they walked together in the convent garden, "whether our little Dino is to become a remarkable genius, or to leave this wicked world altogether, but really he is so unlike other children that he sometimes alarms me!"

Fra Girolamo shook his head, smiling gently.

"The boy is, perhaps, developing early in un-

usual ways," he said, "but do not fear for him. In his case both heart and head are absolutely sound, and he has a very sweet and noble nature. I prophesy that he will one day become a great and good man, and I am sure that he is well-nigh as dear to me, my friend, as he is to you, his own parents."

These kind words, spoken by the good monk, were of great comfort to Guido, and they proved in the end true, as did so many other of Savonarola's wise sayings.

The boy returned the great preacher's affection with a love which was at once deep and enthusiastic, and during the time which had passed since their first meeting they had had many long and interesting talks together.

Although Dino was too young as yet to be admitted into the classes of Dominican novices or to come under the friar's actual tuition, yet Savonarola, who had by this time been elected Prior of San Marco, and who was necessarily a very busy man, was never too greatly occupied to give a few moments to the boy who loved him and whom he included in the number of his "angels," as he was fond of denominating his favorite pupils.

At length Bernardino and his mother had traversed the Piazza in the dim morning twilight and were standing before the great portals of the Duomo. Already such a vast crowd had collected

outside that it was very difficult to get anywhere near the entrance, but the two stout servants who accompanied them managed by dint of some pushing and some persuading to force a pathway for the noble lady and her son through the densely packed mass of humanity until they found themselves quite close to the door.

Many of these people had already been waiting for an hour or more in the drenching mist, for so great was the desire to hear these wonderful sermons that nothing was deemed a hardship which would enable the thousands who loved Savonarola to come within the sound of his voice.

The assembling multitude was a very silent one, and when at last the doors were thrown open and they entered the vast, dimly-lighted building, it was almost without any noise or bustle that they took their places and waited until the services should begin. The time did indeed seem very long to Bernardino before he heard the sound for which he was listening, the far-off echo of boyish voices approaching gradually nearer and nearer through the long cloisters, until at length the procession of white-clad "angels" appeared through the chancel-door and marched, still singing, up and down the aisles of the cathedral.

How Bernardino wished that he might become one of them and live near his beloved friar in a little cell—one of those same tiny cells which the

visitor to Florence to-day may see close to the bare study which the great monk himself occupied.

But the boy knew in the depths of his heart that his father would never consent to his becoming a monk, and he also knew full well that never would he be willing to take the tremendous step without his parents' consent. Many times he had spoken to Fra Girolamo concerning the matter, and each time his kind friend had counselled him wisely and firmly.

"Do not think, my son," he would say, "that our God desires the severing of natural ties or the breaking of hearts in a home, save when he vouchsafes some special and direct call to the individual soul. In my own case I did indeed leave a father and mother who were dearer to me than life itself, and tore myself from a home which was to me as heaven upon earth, but it was because our loving Father gave me a token which would admit of no disregarding. He called me to the Church for some wise purpose, hidden then, but since clearly revealed, and that purpose was none other than the salvation of Florence.

"With you, my son, however, it is far different. I feel very certain that you can do more good to the cause of Christ in this city outside the Church than even within it. Florence needs most sorely men just such as you will, I trust, become—

men who love God simply and truly, and who serve him and the city without guile."

While Bernardino was waiting patiently in the Cathedral on that November morning, watching the first rays of the sun steal through the richly-stained glass of the great windows and listening to the almost continuous anthems which came from the boy-choir, he had plenty of time to think over these words of the friar and many others like them.

At his side his mother knelt, fingering her rosary and murmuring over her Pater-nosters and Ave Marias. But Dino, though he tried to remain in a reverent frame of mind, and at times prayed earnestly with supplications quite original and words that were widely different from any found in the prayer-book, was unable to find very much comfort from repeating over and over again the few Latin syllables which his mother loved so well.

A saying of Savonarola's uttered one day to his class had made a great impression upon the boy's memory, and had taught him much concerning the true nature of prayer.

"Words," cried the great teacher, "are not really indispensable to an act of prayer. When a man is truly rapt in the spirit an uttered prayer becomes rather an impediment, and ought to yield to that which is wholly mental. Thus it will be

seen how great a mistake those commit who prescribe a fixed number of prayers. God does not delight in a multitude of words, but in a fervent spirit."

Bernardino was still pondering this thought, and endeavoring to approach his Heavenly Father in a spirit of true adoration, when from the far-off stalls of the choir the clear young voices burst into a magnificent *Te Deum*. This was always a welcome sound to the congregation, for it signified that their period of expectancy was almost over and that it would soon be time for the preacher to make his appearance.

"We praise Thee, O God," sang the melodious voices, "we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting. To Thee all angels cry aloud."

As they uttered these words some of the women whispered to one another that the sweet songsters were well-named "angels," for no one had ever listened to such music upon earth before!

About half-way through the *Te Deum*, however, there occurred a somewhat singular disturbance in the church, which was a surprise to every one, it was so foreign to the ordinary customs of Savonarola's congregations.

While the singing continued without pause two men were observed pushing their way up the crowded main aisle and endeavoring to secure

places for themselves well towards the front in the assembled multitude. They were both wrapped in long, dark cloaks, and the voluminous folds of silken mufflers almost entirely hid their heads and faces, yet the richness of these same garments and a certain haughtiness of bearing and gesture alike proclaimed them to be of noble rank.

That they wished very much to maintain their incognito was quite evident, but also that they had by no means succeeded in the attempt was also evident. No sooner had the crowd caught sight of the first man, whose broad shoulders and magnificent physique were poorly concealed even by the long enveloping cloak, than a whisper ran from lip to lip, "See, that is Lorenzo de' Medici! The Magnifico himself has come to hear our Dominican preach!"

Nevertheless the people made no outward demonstration, and even the murmur of recognition was soon hushed, for they all stood in great awe of the proud man who ruled them with an iron rod, and they understood quite well that he would by no means tolerate with patience the effort to penetrate his disguise. Besides, the fact that Lorenzo should have deigned to come at all to listen to Savonarola's preaching was in itself a most amazing one.

From the earliest moment when his influence in Florence had begun to assert itself Fra Girolamo

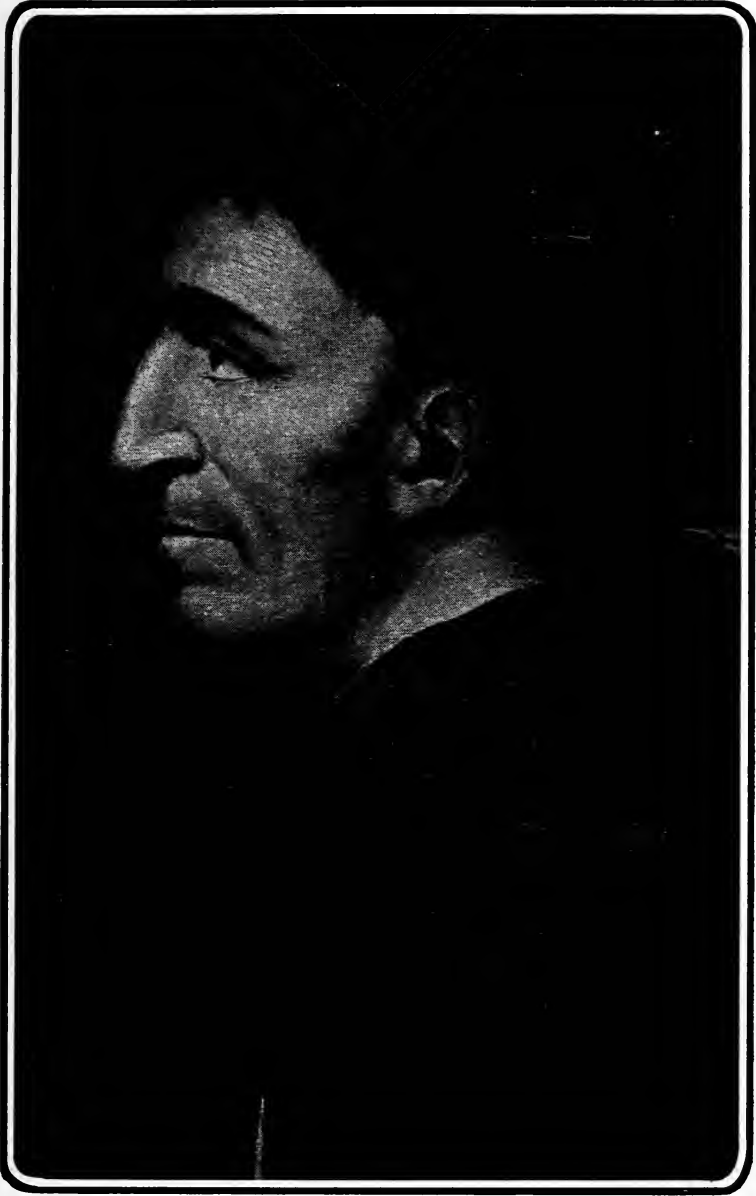
had shown his entire disapproval of Lorenzo's government, and had never hesitated to express that disapprobation. When his fellow-monks elected him Prior of San Marco and suggested that, according to custom, it would be the proper thing for him to go and tender his respects to the ruling despot, Savonarola firmly refused to do so. His thoroughly honest nature made him unwilling to offer any semblance of a reverence which he certainly could not feel for the haughty sovereign.

Strange to say, this treatment did not seem to make Lorenzo very angry. He probably felt for the remarkable monk a vague sort of admiration, recognizing in him a character far above his own. There was too in Lorenzo something of greatness and nobility of soul which made him long for the Frate's esteem, even while he must have realized that he did not deserve it.

Once he had sent a high state official to ask that Savonarola would soften his denunciations of the Government, or else would leave the city altogether, and it was then that the monk had replied by sending him that singularly prophetic message which was so exactly fulfilled.

"Tell your master," cried the Dominican, "that it is *he* who shall go away from Florence, but it is *I* who shall remain here."

Little did Lorenzo comprehend, though it is probable that he was even then somewhat im-



GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA—1452-1498.

pressed by the sombre significance of the prophecy, how soon it was to be fulfilled by his own death, nor how entirely the dominion which he had exercised with so haughty a sway over beautiful Florence was to pass into the hands of the humble Dominican friar, a rival apparently so little to be feared by the great and mighty noble!

But now the slight tremor of excitement caused by Lorenzo's suspected presence had passed away, and a hush of intense expectancy made itself felt throughout the assembled multitude.

The last triumphant strains of the *Te Deum* were echoing through the cathedral: "O Lord, let Thy mercy be upon us, as our trust is in Thee. O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded."

Silently the people watched, as the black-robed figure of their favorite teacher came out from the shadows of the arches and mounted the steps of the pulpit beneath the dark circle of the dome. At last the great voice poured itself forth, filling the vast auditorium with a volume of sound at once rich and sympathetic.

Perhaps no orator has ever possessed a voice so marvellous as Savonarola's. It was so musical that its softest accents were like the rippling of water over pebbles, and so far-reaching, when raised to its full compass, that listeners in the most distant portions of the huge cathedral could hear

distinctly every syllable he uttered. It was a voice which could melt men to tears by its tenderness and pathos, or lift them to heights of unbounded enthusiasm and rapture by its swelling accents.

But though the voice of Savonarola was much in itself, and though it sometimes seemed to have a power almost supernatural over the population of Florence, yet it was really the soul behind the voice which actually swayed the people. It was because they so loved and trusted the character of the great preacher, who never played them false, never deceived them, but who dared to give them undistorted truth as he saw it, that his words were so able to move and touch them.

Savonarola began his sermon that morning by a simple and practical delineation of the Christian life and what it should be for the individual soul which desires to love and follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Master. His text was a passage from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians:

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any

man's work shall be burned he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

The monk began by saying that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his atoning work was the only sure foundation-stone upon which the noble structure of each Christian character could safely be made to rise. Into the building of this superstructure there ought to enter three great principles, which should serve as the main supports of the whole: first, the fear of God; second, love for others; and third, a complete and systematic denial of self and of the baser passions.

"The fear of God," said the friar, "must indeed be the chief and central support of our whole edifice. For unless the soul of man truly reverences and adores its Maker, it cannot possibly love in any genuine or unselfish way its brother-men, neither can it know what self-denial really means. He who loves his Creator in truth will, without doubt, love and desire to help those brothers and sisters who are children of the same great family, and will also strive to make himself a worthy child of that wise and benevolent Parent.

"I beseech you, my brethren," cried Savonarola, "begin to erect at once on the foundation-rock of faith in our Redeemer's sacrifice these three solid pillars, without which your building will be all in vain, and then go on to fashion, leaning upon them, an edifice which will not totter and fall, but

which will stand the searching flames of that last great trial! For I say unto you truly, my friends, that your work, the work that you shall accomplish or endeavor to accomplish in this life, is going to be put through a fiery ordeal which alone can thoroughly determine of what sort it is.

“Do you know what kind of articles will best stand that scorching furnace, that furnace which is God Himself?—for He verily calls Himself a consuming fire. I will tell you some things which cannot be in danger of destruction therein, but which will emerge as pure gold from the refiner’s assaying.

“They are the hours spent beside the bedside of the sick and suffering, the money freely given to the poor, of which the world will never hear, the cheerful encouragement held out to some weary one by a soul perhaps as weary but more courageous, the conquering of some tremendous temptation by God’s help, the sacrifice of wealth or ambition for the good of others; these are parts of that structure, my friends, which no fiery trial can burn up; they are pure gold, and will continue forever, even as long as the immortal soul dwells in that blessed country which God’s children shall inhabit to all eternity!

“But there are other substances of which some of you seem to be forming your dwellings here upon earth, and against which I would desire

earnestly to warn you, for they are most dangerously inflammable. They will not abide the day of his coming, they cannot pass through the refiner's fire.

"Some of you who build in this loose and unstable way may indeed be true though erring disciples of our only Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. You may at the last be saved—be snatched by a wonderful miracle from eternal death—but alas, your whole life-work will perish, and you yourselves will suffer loss, a loss how great and terrible I may not even try to estimate.

"To be saved only *so as by fire!* Ah, my brethren, that will be a sad estimate to be written against any man's earthly existence. Better than not to be saved at all, you say. Truly, I grant that, yet how dreadful to see the whole fabric of one's hopes and dreams crumble away and perish utterly because it is constructed completely of dross! What sort of things will enter into that destructible combination? I will enumerate a few of them: the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, the deceitfulness of riches.

"Oh, you who are loving this world more than the thought of the world to come, how earnestly do I cry unto you to awake from the delusion which makes you think it so important and so precious! Soon you are going to leave it, this beautiful earth, with its jewels and its treasures.

“You may be dressed in gorgeous robes of silk and velvet now, but what certainty have you that when you pass from this sphere Jesus will be waiting to welcome you to his banqueting-house, and that He will put on you the white marriage garment of his righteousness and the golden ring which pledges his redeeming love?

“You may be the possessors now of palaces furnished with wonderful paintings by our greatest masters, and tapestries woven in the richest colors, but what guarantee have you that when you leave these pleasant homes, as so soon you must, to the generations who shall follow you in quick succession, what certificate do you possess that you will enter then into the many mansions which our dear Lord said he was preparing for his true disciples? Are your title-deeds as sure to a dwelling-place within the gates of pearl as they are to your houses inside the gates of Florence?

“Alas, my people, I tell you, No! Many of you are in a state of great danger, and if you continue building as you have begun, your work will most surely be entirely destroyed. I pray God you yourselves may be saved, but if you are, it will be, I fear, only so as by fire! For be well assured, you who are living only for this world and storing up treasures which moth and rust will soon corrupt and cause to perish—be very sure that no gold nor precious stones can ever buy you an

entrance into the Eternal City of God nor purchase his divine favor when you have ceased to merit it.

“Do you think for a moment that all the treasures which the Magnifico has heaped up for himself in his impregnable vaults and unassailable caskets will be fraught with the smallest power to rescue him from that terrible fate which is in store for him? Will they answer to God for all the blood which he has unjustly shed, for all the cries of the orphans and widows whom he has ruined to obtain them? I tell you No! He must soon pass away and leave them all, hearing as he descends to the depths of that awful punishment which awaits him only the melancholy greeting of those other fallen souls who have preceded him there—‘O Lucifer, Son of the Morning, how art thou fallen, and become like unto one of us!’”

Savonarola’s magnetic voice and eloquent gestures had always a measureless power over the congregations which assembled before him. But on this occasion the effect produced upon the immense audience gathered in the cathedral can with difficulty be described.

Long before he had finished his appeal to their consciences, and his description of the fearful mistake those made who were not building character of enduring substances, many of the women and a few of the men were weeping and the whole

assembly was in a state of suppressed excitement. When, however, the matchless notes of his wonderful harangue echoed through the vast building in that thunder of terrible denunciation against the magnificent Lorenzo, no idea can be formed of the panic which ensued. For almost every individual in the multitude knew full well what the speaker himself was entirely ignorant of, that the potentate was actually present in person and was listening to those appalling words.

But the panic of fear into which they were thrown was a peculiarly silent one. Not a person cried out or uttered a note of alarm, though a few women swooned and one or two of the children sobbed aloud. The influence which kept all in a state of such terrified quiet was their intense anxiety as to how Lorenzo would act in this situation. Would he rise in his place and in turn denounce the daring monk, ordering him perhaps to cease from further preaching and leave Florence immediately?

Bernardino was trembling violently from head to foot as he thought of this awful possibility, and weeping silently too, with his head upon his mother's shoulder. Maria Salviati was herself very white, and her great blue eyes were wide with suppressed fear. But she was a brave woman, and she knew well that in Savonarola Lorenzo de' Medici had met his match—a man not

only as capable of ruling men as himself, but also one far greater, because the power of pure goodness and truth is always vastly stronger than that of evil and selfish passion.

So she waited calmly, feeling quite sure in her inmost soul that Lorenzo would never dare to assail the friar in his own church and pulpit, but that the Magnifico's guilty conscience would render him a humbled and helpless man before his accuser.

The sequel proved that Maria's intuition was the right one. For immediately, as the congregation tarried, the seraph notes of the boy-choir rose again in the strains of the *Miserere*, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, according to thy loving kindness," and as the words echoed through the dim arches and up into the vast shadow of the dome, there was a slight movement in the crowd, and quickly a pathway was made through it for the two men, Lorenzo and his companion, who passed hurriedly down the main aisle and out through the wide doorway of the cathedral.

The onlookers saw them go with feelings of intense relief, and those who were nearest at hand noticed that Lorenzo staggered perceptibly as he walked, and leaned heavily on the arm of his companion in a way which contrasted strangely with his usual haughty and athletic bearing.

III

LORENZO'S CONFESSION

SPRING had come once more to Florence, the spring of the year 1492, and again flowers were filling the gardens and fruit-trees were transforming themselves into pyramids of bloom. It has been well said that nowhere is there found a climate so like what one would fancy the climate of heaven might be as that of Italy in springtime.

On one of those glorious days, in the beautiful garden of the Salviati palace, a pleasant little group had gathered in the warm afternoon sunshine, under the falling pink blossoms of a great peach-tree.

Maria Salviati was there, seated before a small round table covered with a dainty white cloth, upon which there were set out dishes of cake and sweetmeats and tiny glasses of wine.

Near her on a wooden bench sat Fra Girolamo Savonarola, his dark cowl thrown back a little and his rugged features illuminated by a glow of unaccustomed enjoyment.

On the grass at his feet lay Bernardino, looking up eagerly into the face of his revered teacher, and, pacing up and down on the gravel-

walk close by, was Guido Salviati, talking earnestly and pausing now and then with impressive gestures in front of the listening group. To an attentive observer it would have been evident that Guido was working himself into a state of excitement about some agitating matter, and that he was trying in vain to rouse his companions to a similar glow of feeling.

The subject was, in truth, a somewhat well-worn one, thoroughly and often discussed by these four friends when together. It was the present political state of Florence and the great abuses of the Medicean rule. But the wonted enthusiasm was quite lacking in Savonarola that afternoon. The sweet calm of the beautiful spring day had crept over him, and made him unusually happy and peaceful in a gentle human way, which was not often his privilege, so stormy was his environment.

He wanted only to sit there in the sunshine, with Maria's kind, hospitable face gazing at him across the table, and Bernardino's wistful, dark eyes looking lovingly up into his. Any interruption, any intrusion of life's hard and bitter things into that delightful hour, seemed to Fra Girolamo just then singularly unwelcome, so he spoke gently in reply to Guido's excited words, and said, "Come, friend Guido! let us forget for this one day the wrongs of Florence and the sins of Lo-

renzo. Let us rest here together among the flowers, and remember for a while only how very fair nature is and how good is our God to give us unworthy sinners such beautiful sights and sounds! Almost it seems, here in your garden this afternoon, as if we had all been transported to the heavenly paradise, where sin and sorrow can never enter more."

Guido was touched by the Frate's unaccustomed mood, and perchance felt a little ashamed of himself for trying to rob that often-troubled soul of its short hour's respite from agitation. So he said no more, but sat down beside his wife and began to talk quietly about other things—the wonderful yield of peaches which they might expect that summer from the unexampled number of blossoms upon the great tree above their heads, and the beauty of a bed of gorgeous tulips and daffodils which lay in the full sunshine near by.

"That is my garden, Fra Girolamo," cried Bernardino gaily. "I helped put in those bulbs last fall, and father said I might have all the flowers to distribute as gifts among my friends this year. So I am going to pick you a great bunch to-day, and I think they will be just the thing to decorate the altar with, do not you? Would you rather have only white ones, or may I put in also a few of the yellows and reds?"

The friar was about to make a smiling reply

to the boy's rapid questions, when suddenly the heavy iron gates which led from the street into the palace-garden were thrown noisily open, and an agitated messenger, panting as if he had been running a long distance, came up the gravel path-way and paused in front of Guido Salviati. The man was dressed in the livery of the Medicis, and Guido recognized him immediately as one of their old servitors, who was a familiar figure in the streets of Florence, since he had been employed by the ruling family for a number of years.

"What is the matter, Tomaso?" said Guido, quite surprised by this sudden entrance without ceremony of a servant into his own private domain. "Is any great danger threatening the city, or do you perchance bring me news that Lorenzo has unearthed another antique fragment in his excavations?"

This remark was made with a somewhat ironical smile, for it was well known that the Magnifico regarded his discoveries of old statues and medals which had been buried for centuries in the ground, and which were relics of Greek civilization, as of more vital importance than the life or death of his Florentine subjects.

The old man shook his head mournfully.

"Alas, my lord!" he said, "a danger is threatening not the city, but my master himself, and I fear Lorenzo de' Medici will never again delight

in a new discovery or look upon one of his treasures. I come on an errand which demands great haste, my lord, for the Magnifico is dying!"

"Dying!" broke forth in astonished chorus the voices of his four listeners.

"Dying!" cried Maria, "and only last night he gave one of the most magnificent of all his gorgeous entertainments at the palace, and it was nearly sunrise this morning when, lying in bed, I heard distinctly the drunken shouts of the revellers returning home from the feast, and now you tell me that Lorenzo is dying!"

"It is true, your ladyship," the old man continued, turning towards Maria, "it is all quite true, as you say. My master did, indeed, entertain a number of his chosen friends in the banqueting-hall last evening, and I have never heard a more joyous party there, nor seen Lorenzo himself in gayer spirits. He was the life of the occasion, and his witty stories and rollicking songs kept them all laughing until the cocks began to crow.

"But just after they had all left a peculiar change came over my master. He was on his way up the great stairway to his sleeping apartments, and I was following close behind him, when he cried out suddenly, and I am sure that he would have fallen backward if I had not caught him in my arms. His face was very white and he seemed almost fainting, but I helped him to his bed and

sent for the physicians immediately. They have been with him, your ladyship, now for more than twelve hours, but I fear he is past their help already, and that God has summoned him from this world. He is quite conscious, though in terrible agony, but he has made one request, and that is the occasion of my being here as his messenger."

"What is that, Tomaso?" said Guido, looking pale and shaken by this unexpected information. "I would gladly do anything I could to make his last moments more peaceful."

"It is not of you, my lord, that Lorenzo asks this favor," Tomaso replied, "but of Fra Girolamo Savonarola, the Dominican monk, who, they told me at the convent, was spending an hour with you this afternoon."

Tomaso turned with a respectful gesture as he spoke and glanced timidly at the friar, for, like most of those who belonged to the Medicean party, he stood in wholesome awe of the terrible preacher.

Fra Girolamo's face showed evidences of intense surprise at these words. That Lorenzo de' Medici, his bitterest enemy, in a moment of great suffering and perhaps of death should deign to ask of him a favor, was indeed a most astounding occurrence. He did not reply at all, and Tomaso, interpreting his silence as an unfavorable omen, plucked up all his courage, and said eagerly:

"Surely you will not refuse a dying man,

Father! He declares that there is not a single priest in Florence whom he can trust to tell him the truth save only yourself. He says you will have the courage and the judgment to inform him what he must do to escape the wrath of Almighty God, at whose bar he will soon be standing. He asserts that all the friars who have clustered about him, and who have flattered him in his happy days, are just a pack of liars and fools. They know nothing, and they can do nothing to ease his troubled conscience.

"My poor master lies there, moaning in his great pain, and saying over and over again, 'Tomaso, Tomaso, as you love me, go and fetch me the Dominican monk, Fra Girolamo, for he and he only can help me!' Therefore I pray you, Father, not to deny his supplication, but to come without delay!"

The aged man paused, out of breath with eagerness and fatigue, and stood waiting silently.

Savonarola did not reply to him, but he rose at once and turned to Maria Salviati and her husband, who were anxiously watching to see what he would do.

The situation was such an astounding one that for a brief moment the suspicion flashed through Guido's mind that some foul play might possibly be meditated; that Lorenzo's illness might be only a ruse to draw the friar into the clutches of

the Medicean party; and that, once within the palace-gates, he might not so easily get out again.

But Guido dismissed the idea almost as quickly as it came, for there was something in the old servitor's demeanor and in the telling of his message which made doubt of its verity impossible.

Before, however, Savonarola had time to speak, Guido had rapidly reached a conclusion, and he stepped forward immediately, saying to Tomaso, "If the Frate decides to go with you, I must be allowed to accompany him; only on that condition shall I consent to sanction his entrance into Lorenzo's palace!"

"Indeed, my master will be most happy if you will escort him thither, sir," cried Tomaso. "But I beseech you both to hasten, for while the friar is making his decision that immortal soul may be passing away, and the opportunity which he still has to influence its destiny may be lost forever!"

The old servant spoke solemnly, for he was really attached to Lorenzo, who possessed great magnetic power, and the sight of the dying man's remorse had filled him with pity for his anguish and a genuine desire to bring him relief.

Savonarola now spoke for the first time, saying, "Tomaso, I am quite ready to go with you, and shall be glad if I may be permitted to be of any help or solace to a soul in its last hour. That is indeed my chief mission in life, and the most im-

portant service which any of my order can render. But you, friend Guido, would, I think, better not accompany me. I am convinced there is not the slightest danger in this mission, and if there were, I would far rather you were not involved in it for the sake of your wife and the boy!"

As he said this he bent down and laid his hand tenderly upon Bernardino's clustering curls, as if he thought that he might possibly be caressing them for the last time.

Probably some such premonition of threatening danger or trial darted through the child's mind also, for he cried out quickly, "Oh, take me with you too, dear friend! Let me go also with you and father! You will not leave me behind!"

But his father answered quickly, "No, no, my son! There would be no propriety whatever in letting a small boy venture on an errand like this. It could not be a seemly thing for you to go into the death-chamber of such a man as Lorenzo 'de' Medici, and besides your place is here with your mother, to watch over and guard her while I am gone. You would not leave her alone surely!"

Bernardino was very near bursting into sobs, but he struggled hard to keep back his tears, and silently embracing both the Frate and his father, he watched them, after bidding Maria farewell, go swiftly down the gravelled pathway and out through the iron gates.

Then Bernardino threw himself on the turf at his mother's feet, weeping bitterly and crying out that something terrible was surely going to happen to those two people whom he loved better than all the world besides, and that never ought they to have gone into the palace of that wicked, dangerous man!

Maria tried to comfort the boy with reassuring words, but she soon broke down herself, for the whole affair had startled and shocked her, though she was too brave a woman to keep back her loved ones from any duty, even if it seemed to be one filled with danger.

As the mother and son wept together the two men were accompanying Tomaso across the broad Piazza and through the streets of the city until they reached the gates of the beautiful home of the Medicis.

They entered without meeting any one, and found the palace in a state of utter confusion. Servants were flying hither and thither with frightened faces, or standing in little groups whispering together as if they expected each moment to see the King of Terrors himself appear through the wide doorway. The tremendous contrast between the joyous life of Lorenzo's court yesterday and the blank despair of his dying-bed to-day was indeed sufficient to account for the stunned and bewildered condition of his household.

No one greeted Guido and the friar or even took any notice of their advent, but, guided by the servant, they passed silently through the hall of the palace from which the grand stairway ascended. In one corner of this vast room Guido noticed a pile of wet clay from which a graceful figure of Aphrodite was already emerging, and he guessed that only yesterday morning Lorenzo must have been amusing himself, as he was accustomed to do, by watching the skillful fingers of his young protégé, Michelangelo Buonarroti, fashion out of the plastic material any shape which his benefactor's whim might suggest.

As they mounted the great staircase they met descending it two monks with troubled angry faces, who they knew from their dress must belong to the order of Fra Marianos.

These men had ever been Lorenzo's most ardent admirers and flatterers, but now in his hour of extreme danger and suffering the Magnifico had turned from them in utter disgust, and feeling that he could place no reliance on their honesty, had with an oath ordered them all out of his chamber.

These monks cast malevolent glances at Savonarola, whom they had long hated and feared, but they did not pause to speak, going hurriedly away from the palace as if some evil spirit were pursuing them.

Tomaso led his two companions on through long corridors, some of which were hung with priceless tapestries, and others decorated by portraits of all the Medicis for generations back, and at last ushered them into an immense room where the level rays of the setting sun were streaming brightly through widely-opened windows. Opposite the doorway, and between two of the largest windows of this room, there was placed a huge carved bed, with polished pillars of mahogany supporting the silken canopy above it.

The heavy curtains, embroidered with mythological figures in gold and silver thread, were thrown broadly apart, and there in the middle of the bed, his face whiter than the pillow which supported his head, lay the dying Magnifico. His large dark eyes were open, and had in them an intent look, as if he were eagerly expecting something. Four physicians were in the room, two of them compounding drugs in a small brazen mortar in one corner, and the others standing by the bed ready to note each new symptom of their patient.

As soon as Lorenzo caught sight of the three men who now entered he quickly lifted his right hand, for he had not strength to raise himself up, and cried, "So you have brought him at length, Tomaso! How very long you have been! Now let every one leave the room at once, for I must

“speak alone with the Frate. I desire his presence and that of no one else; he only shall hear my last confession.”

Tomaso quickly led Guido and the physicians into a small ante-chamber and closed the door, leaving the friar alone with his dying enemy.

Surely no interview could have been stranger than this one, and yet the very fact that Lorenzo should feel remorse, should desire in his last hour to know the way by which a repentant sinner may return to God, had in it much of hope and encouragement.

Savonarola approached the bedside with nothing of sternness or contempt on his countenance, but with a tender, pitying light shining from his kind blue eyes. Lorenzo spoke first.

“I have sent for you, Father,” he said in a voice that was weak yet clear, “because I know well that I am very near death, and I can think of no other man in all this city who will certainly tell me the whole truth but yourself. There are many who would flatter me and lie to me as they have always done, miserable creatures that they are, but you, Father, are a real servant and minister of Almighty God. That I have always felt, although I have hated and despised the message you had to deliver. Even when I heard you preach that terrible sermon in the cathedral, I knew all you said was just—that my sins deserved

it all, and that one day I should surely have to pay the penalty, even as you declared. That dreadful day has now come, Father, and I beseech you first to tell me whether you think there is the slightest hope that my soul may yet be saved by God's extreme mercy?"

Savonarola's face was full of compassion as he answered, "Lorenzo, you have indeed been a great sinner, and there are many things for which you deserve God's righteous indignation. Nevertheless, so wonderful are his pity and his grace, that I doubt not for a moment the Saviour stands waiting to pardon you if you will comply with certain conditions which he imposes and if you will implicitly trust in his promises."

"I do indeed repose all my hope for salvation upon the forgiving love of Christ, whom I have so shamefully treated!" replied Lorenzo. "But there are certain events in my life, Father, which stand out with terrible distinctness, and which seem to discourage me utterly and to take away all my chance for pardon."

"Especially there are three horrible sins which I committed, any one of which, I am sure, would be enough to deter me from entering heaven, and these three crimes are: the sack of Volterra, the robbery of the Monte della Fanciulle, and the massacre of the Pazzi. Tell me, Father, can even God himself render my soul pure and innocent

again when it has been stained by such dark blots as these?"

Savonarola did not reply for a moment, but stood with bent head, as if almost overwhelmed by that list of terrible slaughters.

He thought of all the ruin which this dying man had wrought, of all the happy homes which he had devastated, and of the thousands of innocent women and children whom he had mercilessly butchered. His lips moved in silent prayer, as if he were beseeching God to give him wisdom in the answer he should make, and at length he replied slowly:

"Yes, Lorenzo, I do believe that there is salvation even for one like you, since our Redeemer died for just such sinners, and his sacrifice will avail to satisfy God's justice for every soul who really pleads the merits of that great ransom and trusts in it alone.

"But in order that you may be saved I think, my friend, that you must agree to do three things which I will now tell you of simply and clearly. If you will promise to perform them to the best of your ability, I feel certain that God will blot out forever from the Book of his Remembrance the record of those three dreadful crimes now written against your soul, and will make you holy and clean to stand before his judgment-seat.

"First of all, you must believe firmly that God

is able to pardon you, and that he will do so for the sake of his dear Son."

"It seems almost too much to hope for, and yet I will try to believe it, Father!" replied Lorenzo in weak and trembling tones, for the excitement of the interview was telling upon him and he was visibly growing weaker.

"The second thing which you must do, Lorenzo," continued Savonarola, "is to restore everything wrongfully acquired by you all through your life, so far as this is possible, retaining only so much for your children as will enable them to live comfortably after your death as private citizens."

When he heard these words, and met the calm gaze of the friar, fixed upon him with unfaltering decision, Lorenzo groaned and moved his head restlessly from side to side upon the pillow, like one who strives to fight against fate, but who feels himself far too feeble for the contest.

He did not answer at first, and it was evident that a fierce conflict was going on in his soul between the mighty love which he still bore his magnificent earthly possessions and the overpowering fear he felt that he might eternally lose a heavenly treasure. At length the latter emotion triumphed, and Lorenzo said in a hoarse whisper, "This also, Father, I promise you that I will do."

"The third thing necessary," continued the

monk, in his gentle but unyielding voice, "is the most important of all, and I earnestly trust you will not refuse to perform it. It is that you shall restore to our beloved and beautiful city of Florence that freedom which you have taken away from her, and that you shall ordain for her after your death a popular form of government according to republican usages."

Lorenzo heard this last demand of the Frate with every appearance of increasing agitation and annoyance. So great was his excitement, indeed, that he seemed to have lost the power of speech. With a look, however, which showed plainly enough his utter refusal of this final request he pointed with his right hand towards the door, and then, giving a groan in which mingled angry contempt and hopeless despair, he buried his face in the pillow.

Savonarola stood for a few moments gazing sadly down upon him, and then without another word left the apartment.

Making his way with some difficulty through the confused maze of intersecting corridors, he found at length the great stairway, and began to descend it. Before he was half-way down, however, he heard Guido Salviati calling to him and hurrying after him. Savonarola waited for his friend, and together they left the Medici palace and returned to the convent of San Marco.

The friar walked on steadily and evenly like one in a dream, and it was not until they were almost home that Guido ventured to interrupt his solemn revery and to ask if Lorenzo had made a good confession.

"He began well, truly," replied the monk, "but alas the grasp of this world was too strong upon his soul. He could not elude it even in dying, and the work of atonement for the great sins of his life, which I hoped he would try to perform, proved too much of a strain upon his love for temporal things. Before to-morrow morning dawns he will have passed away to that world where no earthly riches or honor can avail him, and the redemption of Florence must be a thing accomplished by other hands than his!"

In a few words he then told Guido the substance of Lorenzo's confession, and with sad hearts the friends parted, realizing that a great opportunity had been lost and filled with a vast compassion for the misguided man who, in spite of undoubted genius and wonderful personal magnetism, would leave to history only the remembrance of a tyrannous rule and an enslaved city.

IV

THE BONFIRE OF VANITIES

THE seven years from 1489 to 1496 were strange ones in the history of Florence and crowded full of startling events.

After Lorenzo's death in 1492, the city remained for a while in a state of great perturbation and unrest. Pietro de' Medici, Lorenzo's son, was a weak and incapable man, and had never really possessed any influence with the people. It was not long before in utter disgust at his pretentious egotism, the Florentines exiled him altogether and forbade him ever to show himself again inside the walls of their city. The tremendous power which Savonarola wielded over the popular mind now continued to increase daily, and soon he practically held in his hands the whole direction of civic affairs.

But his sway was a purely moral and spiritual one. He occupied no office in the state, and though almost all the great reforms in the Government of Florence took their origin from him, it was only as he suggested them in his sermons and forced public opinion to make them necessary.

The throne from which he ruled was still his pulpit in the Cathedral, and for several years he

exercised over Florence a unique dominion, unlike any rule which had ever existed.

There was never in this noble and gentle heart one thought for himself or his own interest. He lived for his people, and he set before them the ideal which had so long dwelt in the depths of his own soul—the ideal of a city over which God himself should rule and from which evil and oppression should be utterly banished.

Every day the Florentines gathered in vast crowds at the Cathedral to learn what new plan the great leader had originated for them to carry out and what reforms he might suggest which they should inaugurate. Savonarola's most devoted friends and followers were known as the Piagnone, or Puritan party, and Guido Salviati was one of them, as was also Francesco Valori and many another good man. But this party did not at any time embrace the whole number of the citizens. Even during the period of the monk's greatest popularity there existed still a remnant of those evil followers of Lorenzo whom he had named his Campagnacci or Comrades, with Dolfo Spini at their head, who were finally to work Fra Girolamo's ruin and death. The year 1495 marked the very height of Savonarola's power, and after that it began to decline.

It was in this year that the great Council of Florence, the Consiglio Maggiore, was appointed

by his suggestion, and that many new and beneficent laws came from his pulpit throne for the welfare of the city. The people then seemed almost a unit in their tremendous enthusiasm for him. So vast were the crowds which thronged the Duomo to hang upon his words that wooden galleries were erected on the sidewalks of the Cathedral and every foot of space was thus utilized.

These temporary galleries were usually filled principally by the Florentine youths whom Savonarola loved so well, and whom he regarded as his especial charge. Among them he had wrought perhaps his most important and lasting reforms, for he had organized the boys of the city into companies and bands, appointing officers over them and drilling them to help in the work of reform for which he was struggling. So magnetic a power did he exercise over his "angels" that they would willingly have striven to perform his most difficult request. Many of these boys grew up to be noble and true men, and fought a good fight in the last struggle of the Florentine republic.

But the happiest and brightest moments of Savonarola's life had passed away when the year 1496 began. Previous to this for some months the Pope had been making every effort to subdue the Dominican's spirit, or else to get possession of his body.

The man who was at that time occupying the chair of St. Peter was Roderigo Borgia, one of the most wicked monsters known to history, and one whose reign was a disgraceful blot upon the annals of his church. Such a man could not long endure the reports which came to him of Savonarola's teachings and of his vigorous warfare against all sorts of evil and impurity. These two human beings were as utterly opposed to one another as darkness is to light.

So Roderigo plotted and schemed how best he might get rid of Savonarola. He was particularly desirous of enticing him to Rome, for then, he thought, it would be quite easy to imprison him in one of the dungeons of the Vatican, or better still, make a quick end of him by a certain subtle poison which this terrible man knew well how to compound and to administer.

His first move was, under a pretence of great friendliness, to send one of his most important legates to Florence with a message for Savonarola that the Holy Father much wished his presence in Rome, that he might be profited by his preaching and instruction, of which he heard on all sides such very wonderful accounts.

"Now if you will obey the Pope," added his ambassador, "and come to Rome in a friendly spirit, submitting yourself to his supreme authority, I am also even authorized to assure you that

he will bestow upon you the red hat of a Cardinal."

Savonarola replied that he would announce his answer in a few days.

The legate had made his suggestion simply as a bribe and naturally did not dream that it would be known by any one except Savonarola himself. Imagine then his horror and dismay when, on going to the friar's preaching service in the Duomo next morning, he heard the monk utter these startling words:

"Should Alexander II. offer me a Cardinal's hat, thinking thereby to induce me to cease my condemnations of the sin and corruption which exist to-day throughout the church, in these words would I reply to him, 'I want no other red hat but that of martyrdom, reddened by my own blood!'"

After such an expression of opinion, it is needless to say that the ambassador went home in disgust, to inform his master that nothing remained except to coerce the dauntless monk by open and continued hostility.

Other plots made by Alexander failed to entrap Savonarola, so in the early part of the year 1496 the Borgia sent to him a letter or "brief," as it was called, ordering him to stop preaching and remain silent for a time.

It may seem strange that the great Dominican

was willing to obey this command and submit to the orders of so corrupt a man. But we must recollect that Savonarola, unlike Luther and the later reformers, never had in his mind any idea whatever of leaving the Church of Rome or setting up an ecclesiastical organization of his own. His great hope was to reform the church from the *inside*, by expelling from it all that was evil and perverted and retaining the good which he knew so well how to extract from the mass of mistakes and errors by which it had become corrupted.

That he failed utterly in his attempt to accomplish this, and that his life-work for this reason did not seem to accomplish the great results it might had he seen matters in a different light, by no means lays Fra Girolamo open to any charge of wrong or even of faulty judgment. It is more than probable that, at the time and place in which he lived, no other course of action would have been possible to him. Men and events had not yet sufficiently matured to make such an exodus as Luther a little later conducted out from the body of the Romish Church possible in Italy at that date.

Savonarola's mission was indeed a peculiar one, but we cannot doubt that God most directly arranged all things for him, and guided him in every step of his life, over-ruling the very saddest and

strangest portions of it for His own glory and for the ultimate good of His children. The beneficial effects of the Frate's noble sacrifice of himself for humanity can never be adequately measured in this world. They will stretch in widening circles on through eternity's ages. The memory of his noble and lofty purpose is to-day putting strength and courage into many a soul overborne by the misunderstanding and ingratitude of others, and it will continue to do so as long as the world lasts.

Bernardino Salviati's fifteenth birthday had passed, and he had developed into a tall athletic youth. It was just at this time, the middle of February, 1496, that Savonarola in submission to the commands of the Pope became for a time silent. But though he consented not to preach any more startling sermons in the Duomo, his influence with the people remained almost as great as ever, and the Piagnoni became every day more devoted and more enthusiastic. The Carnival that year, especially, showed the reform which Fra Girolamo had been able to institute, for it displayed several altogether new and unusual features.

Up to this time the boys of Florence had been rather notorious for their unruly and boisterous character. They were very fond of playing all manner of wild pranks upon the passers-by, and particularly in the days immediately before Lent

began they were unrestrained by any sort of authority. Quite frequently accidents occurred from these mad capers, and often the boys refused to let people go through the barriers which they erected across the streets without the payment of considerable sums of money as fines.

But this year all was changed. Now the lads had themselves become interested in the good work of the monk, and they kept the Carnival by dressing, not in masques and foolish costumes, but in white robes with olive wreaths on their heads, and they carried in their hands small red crosses, the badges of Savonarola's party. They were still allowed to collect small sums of money, not by demanding it peremptorily from citizens, but by asking them politely for it. But this money was never to be kept for their own uses. It was to be employed in the beneficent work of founding philanthropic banks or exchanges where the poor people could borrow money at a very low rate of interest.

Before the first rays of the sun had begun to illumine the glistening spires and campaniles of Florence, on the last day of the Carnival of 1496, Maria Salviati awoke her son, according to the promise she had made him on the previous evening.

Bernardino sprang up eagerly at the sound of his mother's voice and began to make himself

ready quickly for the great events of the day. Soon he was out of the house and entering the Piazza, where he joined the throng of white-robed youths who were gathering in the dim light and forming in a long procession.

Dino walked beside his cousin and dearest friend, Giovanni Valori, and these two, who were among Fra Girolamo's most devoted admirers, did much to preserve order in the ranks and to keep the time in the chanting, which began as soon as the lines were completed. Then the procession, led by Fra Domenico, Savonarola's chief helper, started on its way towards the Duomo. Never had the morning air seemed fresher or more invigorating to Dino, and never had his heart beat more gaily with hope and courage. The sky was very clear, and the stars still shone brightly, while in the east a faint rosy flush was beginning to creep above the horizon.

Bernardino realized in some degree that his dear friend Fra Girolamo was in danger, and he felt most strongly the cruelty of the Pope's command for silence. Yet he was sure, with the light-hearted trust of boyhood, that all would certainly be made right in a little while, that the purity and goodness of the Frate's teachings *must* triumph over the evil and wrong of those who opposed him, and that in a few months not only Florence but all Italy would be at his feet, welcoming him

as a great prophet and deliverer from sin and disaster.

Giovanni Valori felt just as Bernardino did, for the cousins had often discussed the question together, and they were both enthusiastic young optimists.

"I tell you, Giovanni," Bernardino would cry, as they paced together the long corridors of the Valori palace, "the day is not far off when you and I shall be men, and when we shall see Florence in very truth transformed into a Holy City, the capital of a new and reformed Italy, the land where only Christ is King, and whence Satan's rule shall have been in very truth banished! I do not know how this is to come about, nor am I sure that the Frate himself knows, but God will reveal it all to him in time, even as he has already disclosed so many wonderful events beforehand which have all come to pass!"

This confidence in the friar's inevitable success, and in the divine character of his mission and work for Florence and for the world, was strong in Bernardino's young heart on that February morning as he walked swiftly onward, thinking gladly of the Holy Sacrament of which he was about to partake and of the exciting events which were to crowd the long day. Very sweet and clear rose his strong soprano voice, as he led the other boys in singing:

“Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.”

Like angels, surely, seemed the white-robed lads as they wound in and out through the intersecting streets, and from many a window mothers' faces bent, watching them eagerly and thanking God for the good man who had rescued these young lives from temptation and had led them to love purity and truth.

“O Lord, spare thy people and bless thy heritage; govern them and lift them up forever!”

The final notes of the chanting ceased as the white lines paused before the great doors of the Duomo, and then silently and solemnly the lads paced down the long aisles to their stations assigned. So many there were of them that they half filled the vast edifice, and the sight of their ardent faces raised in Fra Girolamo's heart a strange ecstasy and joy as he stood before them and prepared to administer the Holy Sacrament. They were to him like his own children—these youths for whom he had prayed and toiled so unceasingly.

The whole force of his great and loving nature, denied the ordinary human affections, had poured itself out upon his “angels”—a term which had gradually been extended from applying only to

the Dominican novices until it took in all the lads belonging to the Piagnone party. In them he saw the only hope for the holy city concerning which he dreamed, the only chance that God's kingdom of chastity and righteousness might really be established upon earth.

The dreams which occupied the monk's lofty soul on that February morning could never be fulfilled in this world, yet who shall say that somewhere in the eternal ages of God's unfathomable purpose he will not find their full completion, and, seeing of the travail of his soul, be satisfied?

It was Bernardino's turn at last to kneel before his beloved friend, and looking up into his face to receive from him the consecrated wafer. Very kindly did the deep blue eyes gaze down at the boyish countenance, so full of noble ardor and enthusiasm, and a special prayer rose from the Frate's soul that this lad might have a peculiar blessing, that his life might be made of much service to Florence and to God's kingdom upon earth,

Perhaps Dino was conscious that the friar was praying particularly for him. At any rate there came into his soul at that moment a glow of devotion to his Saviour and to the heavenly Kingdom that suffused his whole being. It seemed to him that he desired nothing of this world's honor or glory, nothing save to contend for Jesus Christ and win battles for the honor of his great name.

"Thy soldier let me be, dear Lord," he prayed, "even if I die fighting in thine army!"

Little did the boy think as he knelt there, free from the anticipation of coming trouble on that pleasant winter morning, that his prayer was to be answered in a way he could not possibly have guessed, and that real warfare was to enter all too soon into his happy young life!

The service at the Cathedral was a short one, and the youths, having been dismissed, passed quietly but swiftly out through the wide doors. They did not form again into regular lines, but with gay shouts of "Viva Gêsu, Viva Firenze!" "Hail to Jesus Christ, Hail to Florence!" they hurried to the completion of their work in the great Piazza. The whole of every day for a week past had been busily spent in this labor, which was the preparation of an entirely novel and peculiar feature of the Carnival celebration. The suggestion for it had probably arisen originally in the brain of Fra Domenico, Fra Girolamo's dearest friend, and the one of all the Dominican monks who aided him most successfully in his work among the boys.

This good father appreciated perhaps even more fully than did his graver and sadder brother that childish spirits cannot be repressed beyond a certain degree, and that it would be quite impossible to expect the lads to relinquish willingly all their

old accustomed sports of Carnival-time without offering them some equivalent of amusement and excitement. So it was planned that in the centre of the Piazza della Signoria there should be erected a huge pyramid formed of unusual and surprising materials, which when night came should be set aflame, forming what was called a "Bonfire of Vanities." This pyramid was now almost completed, and the view of it which met the eyes of Bernardino and his cousin Francesco, with the bright rays of the rising sun gleaming upon it, was indeed a strange one.

On the top of a huge tree-like structure which rose in the centre of the square there was perched a ridiculous figure, supposed to be a caricature of the old wicked Carnival as it was formerly kept. All around the trunk of the tree and leaning upon its branches had been nailed boards which formed tier after tier of shelves, and upon these were piled in wildest confusion objects of every description, all coming under the title of "Vanities," and destined that evening to perish in the flames even as the old Carnival was forever to disappear and give place to the new and better methods of celebrating it.

It is quite impossible to enumerate all the kinds of articles which constituted that curious collection. There were spangled dresses and hideous masks which had been used at former Carnival-

times. There were dainty kid slippers, white satin gowns, and wreaths of artificial flowers in which fascinating maidens had been accustomed to appear at the dance on that last evening before Lent began. Then there were pictures of the Greek gods and goddesses which their owners of the Piagnone party felt were no longer suitable subjects for them to gaze upon, there were books which contained evil and wicked stories and songs, there were playing-cards and dice, and all sorts of games connected with or suggestive of gambling.

Looked at from a distance the pyramid presented the spectacle of a mass of gorgeous color and iridescent light, for enough real and imitation jewels mingled in the array to collect and refract the sun's rays with quite dazzling effect.

Fra Domenico stood at the base of the structure, gazing up at it, and as he saw Bernardino and Giovanni approaching he beckoned them hastily to his side.

"See, my children," he said when they came near, "much of this work has been accomplished, and is well done too. You have both helped nobly in it, but I have still some finishing touches for you to perform. Here, Giovanni, you are very light and nimble, my son; I want you to climb up to that third tier of shelves and arrange those red velvet cloaks and satin masks more gracefully,

filling up an empty space which does not look well in the middle.

"For you, Bernardino, my careful boy, I have another task which I could not well entrust to any one else. I would like you to take this horn of powder, and climbing up just as high as you possibly can, empty it down into the hollow of the pyramid. Fra Silvestro tells me that though much wood and inflammable substance has been stored there, the gun-powder has been forgotten, and without it we shall not have that mighty explosion and tremendous crash downward which will make the Spirit of the old Carnival up there tumble suddenly over into the midst of the flames, where he so rightly belongs."

Giovanni and Dino undertook their appointed tasks with eagerness, and were soon climbing skillfully and lightly upwards from shelf to shelf. When Dino reached the top he stood just beneath the gigantic and ugly figures of the Carnival, and giving a great shout of "Viva Firenze!" he emptied the powder-flask into the heart of the pyramid.

As soon as both boys were safely on the ground again they found Fra Domenico ready to send them and a number of their companions off upon another errand.

"My children," he said, "you see that, while the general aspect of our pyramid when viewed

from a distance is most successful and appears to be entirely completed, on a nearer examination the fact reveals itself that there are on the lower shelves many vacant spots which I should be glad to see filled.

“Now I should like to have you older lads go out again this morning upon a final quest through the city, and try if you cannot bring in to me a few more vanities which really ought to be surrendered for the spiritual good of their possessors!”

Fra Domenico said this with a twinkle in his eye, for he was always ready to perceive the humorous side of a question, and the boys loved him greatly, not only for his loyal and generous spirit and for his intense devotion to Fra Girolamo, but also because he understood them so thoroughly and was ever ready to furnish them with a little harmless fun and innocent diversion, which, boy-like, they were ready for.

Off again started the white-robed seekers for treasure, out into the more unfrequented streets and through those portions of the city which they thought might possibly have been overlooked in the earlier search. Dino and Giovanni led a party of ten younger boys, and they all sang as loudly as they could one of those quaint Italian songs which Fra Girolamo had composed and set to music for them:

“Non fu mai più bel solazzo,
Più giocondo me maggiore,
Che per zelo e per amore
Di Gesù divenir pazzo.
Ognun grida com' io grido,
Semper pazzo, pazzo, pazzo.”

Between the intervals of singing they shouted lustily, “Viva il Piagnoni!” “Viva Fra Girolamo!” “Viva Firenze!”

At length they paused before an old and gloomy-looking mansion and surrounded its gateway in a white circle, looking very picturesque with their roguish boy-faces and clustering curls crowned by the green olive-wreaths. Bernardino stepped forward and began a polite little speech to the wrinkled old woman who appeared in the doorway.

“Good mother,” he said, “we are sent here by the friar Girolamo who is doing so much to purify and improve our beautiful city. We are boys who belong to the Piagnone party, and we are proud that we can help on its good work a little. So we ask your assistance, mother, in what we are trying to accomplish for the great Carnival festivities to-night. Perhaps you may not have heard, since you live in this distant and lonely neighborhood, and probably do not often venture far from home, what sort of celebration we are to have in

the Piazza della Signoria this evening in place of the old Carnival customs?"

The woman looked at him stupidly and did not reply for a moment. She was evidently very old, and apparently took little notice of present-day events.

"I do not know what you are talking about, young master!" she said at length, "for, as you say, I am able to go out little now, having the rheumatism so badly in my feet.

"It is true I have heard the neighbors speaking sometimes about the Dominican friar who preaches often in the Cathedral, and who seems to be turning the world upside down with his strange notions. However, if he has done anything to change the old, bad doings of the Carnival season, I am very glad indeed, for I remember them well when I was young and how many wild and cruel pranks the boys used to play. Eh! but the beautiful dresses we wore then, my sisters and I, when we went out in the evening and danced through the streets, singing and shouting!"

"That is just what we want, good mother!" cried Bernardino eagerly, seeing his opportunity arise here. "Haven't you by chance some of those very dresses put away upstairs in your garret, safely preserved all these years in lavender-flowers or gum-camphor?"

"Indeed I have, my lad!" answered the old

woman quickly, her memory going back with pleasure to those gay nights when she was a rosy-cheeked lass, "indeed I have, a whole cedar-wood chest of them. Many's the time I have got them out and looked them over, for my sisters are all gone now, poor dears, and I am left alone of my whole family in this big house."

Bernardino saw plainly that this was a case calling for diplomacy, so, motioning his companions to stand back a little, he approached nearer to the old woman and said very gently:

"Mother, those garments in which you and your sisters used to dress are of no use to any one now, and still worse, they are only sinful reminders of the frivolity and evil of worldly pleasure. Would you not be willing, after they have lain idly by for so many years, to surrender them for your own spiritual good and for the sake of the example to others which their sacrifice will be? We boys are sent out by Fra Domenico, who is Fra Girolamo's helper and friend, to gather a few more materials, in order that our great Pyramid of Vanities may be completely filled up for the bonfire this evening.

"All over Florence those who love the reforms which our great Savonarola is instituting have surrendered their foolish possessions—their rich dresses and pictures and gaudy ornaments. Tonight these are all to be destroyed, and you can

well imagine how much better the whole city will be after such a thorough purification. Would you not be glad, good mother, to contribute that chest with its memories of your youthful follies in order to help us fill up a few empty spaces which still exist in our pyramid?

"Then, if you are able to walk so far this evening, it will surely be a great satisfaction for you to come to the Piazza and enjoy the glorious spectacle of the huge bonfire, and old Master Carnival himself tumbling down into the middle of it. You will then realize that your own treasures have gone up in the same great cloud of smoke with many richer and more valuable things. Besides you, who will, I hope, soon be in a better world than this, would not in any case much longer seek to cling to these perishing things of earth!"

The boy uttered this long speech quite as though he were delivering a sermon, and if there was a roguish twinkle in his eye underneath his demure expression, the old woman's dim vision certainly did not catch it.

The other boys waited in gleeful anticipation, for a whole chestful of vanities would, they felt, be a valuable discovery, and perhaps would be quite sufficient to meet all Fra Domenico's wishes.

As she took in the full meaning of Bernardino's speech the old dame's wrinkled visage clouded for a moment. She manifestly did not quite relish

the giving up of her possessions treasured during so many lonely years. But almost immediately better thoughts prevailed, and she said quite cheerfully, "Well, my children, I suppose I too ought to be willing to join the good work in which all the best people of Florence are engaging. It is rather hard to think of having all those pretty dresses burned up, but perhaps God will approve of me for it, and maybe the monks will pray to him for me that all the sins of my life may be forgiven!

"Now, boys, you may come with me upstairs, but not the entire party. I cannot have my house tracked with mire from the streets by the feet of twelve boys. Four of you will be quite enough to carry down the chest, and the rest must stay here quietly and wait."

Dino selected two of the most stalwart lads of his body-guard, and with these and Giovanni he followed the old woman into the house and up several flights of narrow winding stairs, until they reached a low room under the sloping rafters. There, indeed, was the carved chest, and taking a key from the bunch which hung at her girdle, the old woman opened it and began to look quickly over the treasures within.

Much to Bernardino's delight the contents of the box were, though not specially valuable in themselves, just the sort of things most desirable

for the construction of the pyramid. There were ball-dresses of bright pink, blue and red, manufactured out of gauzy fabrics and covered over with glittering crystal spangles that shone like diamonds. Then there were great painted fans and huge hats with long curling feathers which recalled the fashion fifty years earlier. There were also many small articles which would be of use to fit into corners and niches, such as powder-puffs, lace veils, dainty kid slippers, silk stockings, etc.

The old woman was evidently afraid of looking too long at all these cherished articles for fear lest she should change her mind and be unwilling to sacrifice them. Giovanni and Dino also perceived the danger of this, so they were very glad when she hurried them all quickly back into the chest again, shut down the cover and bade the boys take it away as soon as they could.

All the way on their slow and careful passage with their heavy burden down to the street-door, the old creature followed them, talking earnestly.

“You will be sure to tell Father Domenico all I have given up to help on the Piagnone work, will you not, my children, and you will beg him to say some special prayers for me during the coming Lent, because I think I really deserve them after letting you have all that beautiful chestful! Indeed I know by to-night I shall be sorry that I let them go, and every time I mount the stairs I

shall be missing them and wishing I could look them over again! Beautiful things they were, truly, and beautiful times we all had in those gay days long ago!"

At this she sighed heavily, but the next moment plucked up heart again and continued brightly, "Well, well, as you say, my boys, they were all foolish vanities, and we who cannot stay long in this world anyway are probably far better off without them. How I should like to see the big bonfire to-night in the square, and all the fine things burning up together! Perhaps I shall manage to hobble that far, if one of the neighbors will kindly give me an arm to lean upon. I will surely try to get there if it is possible."

By this time the boys had safely arrived with their burden in the street, and Bernardino, letting one of the others take his place in carrying the chest, took the old lady's hand with a graceful bow and thanked her warmly for her kindness in the name of the Piagnone party. Then the merry procession, forming again, hurried back to the Piazza and delivered up their treasures to the hand of Fra Domenico.

The bonfire of vanities that evening was declared by all Florence to be a great success. Swiftly the tongues of flame leaped up around the huge pyramid, eagerly devouring it with all its contents, and at just the right moment came

the crashing explosion of gunpowder which caused old Master Carnival to come rattling down from his high perch and disappear into the very heart of that abyss of flame.

It seemed to Bernardino, when all was over and the great glare of the fire was dying down into dull heaps of grey ashes, that he had never in his whole life enjoyed a day so much as that one. Scarcely a single thing had happened in it to mar his pleasure. He had danced and sung and shouted with the others to his heart's content; he had collected pennies from the passers-by for the good cause, and then gone and emptied them by the handful into Fra Domenico's lap.

Only one circumstance had cast a momentary cloud over his soul's sky that day, and remembrance of it made him pause, as he was about to accompany his parents homeward after the Carnival celebration was all over, and decide to wend his steps in another direction.

"Mother," he said, slipping his arm about her waist and leaning down a little to whisper in her ear, for he was now several inches taller than she, "I am not coming right home with you. I must go around by the convent of San Marco and see the Frate for a moment. It troubles me to recollect that each time I have met him to-day his face has worn so strange and sad an expression. I shall not be able to sleep well, mother,

unless I have asked what it is that has grieved him."

"Very well, dear boy," answered Maria, quite content to have Bernardino go on such an errand. "I trust you may be able to cheer him a little, but I think it is quite easy to realize that our Frate has enough to make him anxious in these last days. Only do not stay so late as to weary or tax him, Dino mio, for it is almost midnight now."

Bernardino hurried away through the dimly-lighted streets, which seemed even darker by contrast with the brilliancy made by the bonfire in the square. Reaching the convent he passed through the long cloisters, and entering the building soon found his way to Fra Savonarola's cell, where he knew that he would be always welcome. Many a time during the last seven years had he come thither with his boyish grievances and disappointments as well as with his spiritual difficulties and doubts, and always had the tender-hearted monk seemed at leisure to help his young friend.

Dino was sure that he would find the Frate here now, for he had noticed that quite early in the evening the monk had retired from his place among the Dominicans in the Piazza, leaving the whole charge of affairs in the hands of Fra Domenico. As the boy softly approached the friar's cell he noticed that the door stood half-open and

perceived the dark-robed figure seated in his accustomed place in front of the plain wooden desk above which hung the crucifix.

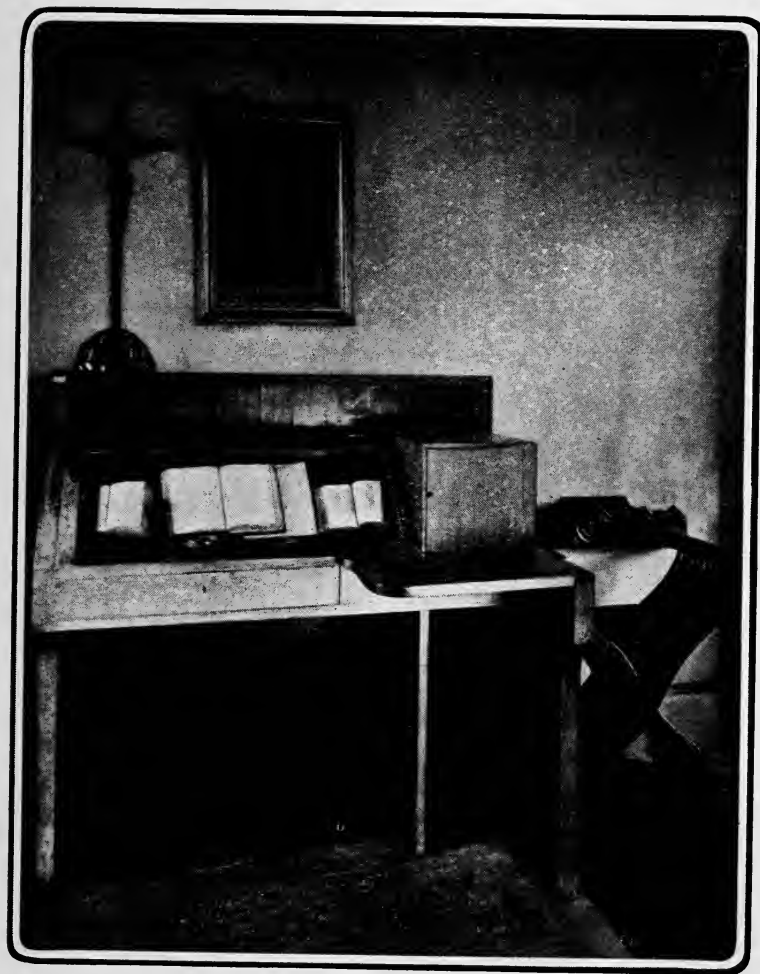
Visitors to Florence to-day may enter that very cell, unchanged in every respect, and look upon the hard, uncomfortable chair and the bare little room where the great leader spent so many hours of his life.

Bernardino stood outside for some time quite motionless, feeling that he dared not enter and speak to his friend. For the Frate was neither reading nor writing. His head was bowed upon his desk, and occasionally a stifled sob broke from his lips.

The boy's first thought was that some new and great catastrophe had occurred; that the Pope had really issued the dreaded excommunication which all feared would be his next move, or that some powerful member of the Piagnoni had deserted his place in the ranks and gone over to Dolfo Spini like a traitor.

Dino turned hot and cold by turns in his excitement, and at last, being able no longer to control himself, burst into the room, crying, with tears in his eyes, "Tell me, dear Father, who has hurt you, who has wounded you? I cannot bear it to see you so grieved and troubled!"

The boy's cry seemed at first unheeded, but at length Savonarola, like one who wakes out of



SAVONAROLA'S CELL IN THE CONVENT OF SAN
MARCO.

a trance, lifted his head and looked at Bernardino. His face was sad and drawn with mental suffering, and his eyes had lost all their accustomed fire.

"My son," he said, speaking almost in a whisper, like a man who is exhausted by some terrible struggle, "you ought not to have come to me to-night. This has been such a bright, joyful day for you, and for me one of such pain and anguish! Our lives must separate here, my child; they will henceforth be too diverse for us to continue as comrades and friends.

"Would to God it might have been otherwise, Dino mio, for I am indeed loath to lose your sweet companionship. It has been a solace and comfort to me always. But you were born for gladness and beauty, and I for pain and sacrifice. God forbid that the shadow of my fate should cast itself across your fair young existence. To know that such was to be the case would be the bitterest drop in the cup held to my lips.

"Go from me then, my child, for to-night at least. To-morrow I shall be calmer and see you again, but not for long. It is best that henceforth you should not be much or often with me, but should lead your own bright life with the friends of your own age."

Bernardino listened to these words in amazement. It seemed to him that they could not really

be spoken by the Frate whom he had known and loved so long. The idea that Savonarola really wished him to go away, or desired their cherished friendship to cease, did not, however, force itself with any reality upon his consciousness. He felt that the situation was incomprehensible, but was sure that some entirely new sort of danger or sorrow had entered the monk's soul, and that while he could not banish it, he might at least soothe and comfort his beloved friend. So he knelt for a long time without speaking beside the little wooden desk, caressing Savonarola's hand and looking up tenderly into his white, sad face.

At length the mere fact of the boy's presence and fervent devotion did seem to carry a sense of comfort and peace to the Frate's troubled heart. The tense lines faded out of his countenance and its healthy color began to come back gradually.

"God bless you, my boy!" he said, in a tone quite calm and natural. "You have indeed helped me to-night, and I am thankful that you came as you did. The sight of your sweet face has partly banished from my soul the imprint of an awful vision which came to me to-night in the Piazza, and which seemed drawn there in letters of fire. God grant you may never know what such a vision is, my Bernardino, and may our merciful Father also grant in his sovereign pity that this foreshad-

owing shall not prove to be the true premonition of his ordained destiny for me!

"Go home now and pray for me, as I know you will do, that he will give me strength to endure all that is to come, whether my pathway lead through the flames or elsewhere. But do not be anxious about me for to-night, my son. The horror has departed, and, by God's grace, you have brought me peace. I shall sleep well, and I trust that you also may have quiet slumbers."

These last words were spoken in a manner at once calm and authoritative, and seeing that the friar's deep blue eyes were no longer full of that strange and awful terror, and that his lips were smiling in their old accustomed way, Bernardino obeyed his friend, and, kissing his hand reverently, went silently home through the darkness.

Many months afterward he realized that the revelation which came to Savonarola that evening as he watched the great burning in the Piazza was indeed the true forewarning of another far different blaze which was to be kindled there, to consume not the harmful and delusive vanities of this world, but some of the most precious and most noble possessions which Florence, or the earth itself, ever contained.

Fortunately this realization did not at that time enter in the faintest degree the boy's mind. Had it done so, it would have then and there ended his

boy-life and caused the years of sober and thoughtful manhood to begin prematurely for him. As it was, he was only conscious of the fact that his beloved friend had from some cause been in great and peculiar trouble, and that his own affectionate sympathy had been able to bring him comfort.

For this he was truly glad and thankful, so after he had sent up a very fervent supplication that God would mercifully prevent the Frate's sad vision from ever coming true, Dino, utterly worn out with his long day's pleasure and excitement, fell almost immediately into the dreamless slumber of healthy and weary boyhood.

V.

GATHERING CLOUDS

MORE and more darkly the storm continued to gather upon Savonarola's horizon during the year which followed that memorable Carnival season of 1496. Complications arose between that political party, the Piagnone, which had vigorously espoused his cause, and the other parties which were striving for mastery in Florence. Many of Fra Girolamo's formerly devoted friends seemed to grow cold and lose their great faith in him, under the continued opposition which the Pope maintained to him and to his teachings.

Alexander had succeeded in preventing his preaching for a few months, but it was only for a little while that the great preacher could hold back his message at the command of the wicked Borgia. He said, in explaining his return to the pulpit: "I am not disobeying the ideal Pope or the true Vicar of Christ in acting thus, for Christ's true representative upon earth would necessarily be actuated by the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of love. This wicked order then cannot really be authoritative and I shall not longer submit to it, for God has ordained me to preach, and for that purpose has sent me into the world."

So Fra Girolamo did preach in his own church of San Marco, and multitudes still attended the services. Yet the audiences were not as of old, always eager and reverent. Oftentimes critical and derogatory remarks might be heard throughout the crowd, and not infrequently the friar, when he appeared in the streets of Florence, was saluted by hisses and curses, where formerly he had received only laudation and tender benedictions.

This state of things increased to such a degree that some of the more influential Piagnone leaders became alarmed, and insisted that Savonarola should not in future venture into the public thoroughfares without an armed guard of six men, which they furnished from their own ranks.

The necessity for such protection hurt the monk's soul cruelly, and he at first utterly refused to submit to it. But when at length a sharp stone, hurled by one of Dolfo Spini's followers, wounded his forehead badly, and he saw that the danger to his life was really considerable, he consented. For though Fra Girolamo was at this time greatly depressed by the aspect which affairs in Florence were assuming, he still had much of that buoyant enthusiasm for the city's ultimate good which had formerly been able to carry all before it and to transform Florence for a time into that ideal place the dream of which existed in his great soul. He still felt that he had much to live for, and

that the desires of his heart might yet be realized, and he was not willing that his life should be cut short by some reckless enemy's chance shot.

During this year the friendship between Bernardino Salviati and the Frate continued as warmly as ever. Neither of them ever referred to the dreadful vision which the monk had beheld on the night of the Bonfire of Vanities, but it is very certain that neither of them forgot it. The remembrance of it was burned into Fra Girolamo's soul as with a searing-iron, and although he tried not to dwell upon it, the impression frequently revived with force in his darkest and most despairing hours.

Dino realized that the dream must have been a terrible one, but he hoped and prayed that it might not, like so many of the Frate's other forewarnings of future events, ever be fulfilled. His chief aim in life now seemed to be to carry all the cheer and comfort he could to that noble heart which was so weighed down by the ingratitude and cruelty of men.

Slowly those fourteen months wore away, and still the shadows deepened over Florence and over her greatest son, until in May, 1497, the Pope sent to Savonarola what was called the first or partial excommunication. This blow did not affect the friar greatly, for he had so long been expecting it that it was not a shock, yet it meant the

practical cessation of his influence over Florence. He now stopped preaching and withdrew into the cloister of San Marco, where he spent most of his time writing in his cell.

Many more of his professed friends now deserted from the ranks of the Piagnoni, and the Mediceans were continually plotting for his final overthrow and their return to power. But the Frate was too large a man to be easily dislodged from his position in the people's affection, and his marvellous magnetism held them for a good while after they had lost their first supreme faith and enthusiasm.

The summer of 1497 was one of the saddest which Florence ever knew. Not only was the friar forbidden to preach or to administer the Sacrament, but all were aware that the second and more emphatic excommunication might at any moment be sent to him, by which he would be prohibited from speaking with or approaching any of his brother monks, and would be placed utterly outside all hope of the Church's final pardon or absolution.

Besides the Florentines knew that if they continued much longer to harbor and listen to this dreadful sinner, this renegade monk, as the Pope termed him, the Borgia would hurl down upon their city the terrible interdict which would practically cut them off from all the rest of Catholic

Europe and would utterly ruin their commerce and trade.

Under such circumstances we can only wonder that numbers of the people still remained devoted to the Dominican and still believed that God was with him as he was not with Alexander VI. But this single man was able for a time to hold in check by the sheer power of his pure nobility and righteousness the worst forces of human nature, and to make the envy and self-interest of a whole people shrink down like whipped curs before his dominant personality.

But another calamity fell upon unhappy Florence during those sultry summer days, for a strange and dreadful pestilence visited the city. Many scores of people died and hundreds were ill, so that the wealthy residents took fright and mostly left the town, or at least sent their families away.

Guido Salviati despatched Maria and Bernardino to a pretty little villa which he owned in the country, but he himself remained at the Frate's side, and together they visited and cared for the sick and dying, doing all in their power to make conditions more healthful and comfortable.

Dino had begged hard to remain in the city, but his father would not consent, so he and his mother spent two months in great anxiety, fearing that each new day would bring them tidings that

either one of the men whom they loved so dearly had succumbed to the dreaded disease.

Neither the cool breezes nor the beautiful scenery of their mountain retreat seemed at all desirable to Maria or Dino, and both were heartily thankful when September came once more and they were permitted to return to Florence.

They found both Guido and the Frate well, though thin and worn. Fra Girolamo was in surprisingly good spirits, and greeted Bernardino with so much of his old cheerfulness that the boy was greatly surprised, and marvelled how the summer anxiety and toil could have produced such a result.

Savonarola explained the matter to his young friend as they paced together again the familiar cloisters of San Marco.

"It has not been an unhappy summer, my son," he said, laying his slender hand upon the boy's stalwart shoulder. "God has been very good to me in permitting me again to find work in Florence which has drawn me near to the hearts of my people. It has been a great privilege to go about among the sick and dying and help them both physically and spiritually, and to know that they really desired to have me near to minister to them.

"Several times I nursed members of the Campagnacci whose friends had deserted them in ter-

ror for their own safety, leaving them to die alone in filthy hovels without even a cooling draught of water for their fever-parched lips. One young fellow your father and I carried to the infirmary of San Marco, and, as I sat beside him the last night before he died, he looked up into my face and said, 'Father, I have persecuted you and reviled you! Many times I have heaped curses upon your head as you passed in the street. But worst of all, Father, I must make confession to you that it was I who threw that sharp stone which cut your brow and which was directed with far deadlier intent. I would have been glad that day if I had killed you, Fra Girolamo, and now I have received at your hands the last acts of tenderness and generosity which one human being can render to another. I beseech you to grant me your forgiveness, and to pray God that he may also in mercy pardon my sins and permit me entrance into his presence for Christ's sake.'

"With this prayer upon his lips," continued the Dominican, "the poor young fellow passed away, but I am very sure that our merciful Lord did pardon him, and receive him into the mansions prepared for his children. This case and many similar ones have been a great comfort to me, and I think that the influence of them has made itself felt perceptibly throughout the city. Everywhere as I pass along the streets now I hear bless-

ings and kindly words, where a few months ago only maledictions were showered upon me."

"Then I do not wonder that you look so much happier, dear Father," cried Bernardino cheerily. "Perhaps this pestilence has been a blessing in disguise to draw the hearts of the people back to you once more and to show them how truly you love them, so that you are willing to sacrifice life itself for them.

"Surely the Pope himself will be touched when he hears of all you have done and suffered this summer, and of how you have obediently refrained from preaching according to his orders. In that event he may withdraw the excommunication—do you not think it is possible?"

But the Frate shook his head gravely as he answered, "I place as little reliance on Alexander, my son, as I would place upon the Prince of Darkness! He will work out his own evil ends in his own despicable ways.

"Meanwhile my greatest trial is to be kept from preaching to my people; that I cannot much longer endure! Let the Borgia do what he will, I must soon again ascend the pulpit of San Marco and break this silence which I have been preserving at his order for so many months."

Fra Girolamo spoke these last words with a flashing light in his blue eyes, and Bernardino felt that he was once again the hopeful and confident

leader, the inspired prophet of a people's trust. The boy's youthful elasticity of spirit made him sure that all would yet be well, and that the monk would finally triumph over the power of Rome. But that power was a crushing force, whose full weight had as yet by no means made itself felt. This Bernardino could not realize.

The following month, October, saw Alexander despatching his last thunderbolt against the recreant friar—the final excommunication. At the same time he again threatened the Florentines with interdict if they did not surrender to him this disturber of the Church's peace.

Savonarola's proud spirit rose against this cruelty and oppression as a great rock rises out of the waves which break upon it. For more than six months subsequent to the first excommunication in May he had remained entirely silent, not submissive or acknowledging himself in the wrong, but willing to obey in so far as he conscientiously could the nominal head of the Church. Now his consciousness of being morally pure and upright and his desire for self-justification before his persecutors asserted themselves too strongly to be any longer repressed. On Christmas Day, 1497, Fra Girolamo entered once again his pulpit in San Marco, and for several months continued his sermons as of old to crowded audiences.

However, a change had come over his preach-

ing. Inevitably the strain under which he had labored for two years had begun to tell even upon his dauntless spirit. No longer was the theme of his preaching the sins of the people and the woes which should descend upon them and upon the Church unless a reformation was brought about. Now his mind naturally centered upon his own peculiar situation in the eyes of the Church and the world, and he could not help trying to justify it.

Conscious of his own absolute integrity and purity of motive, it would have indeed been strange had he been willing to submit without remonstrance to degradation and ignominy at the hands of so wicked and debased a man as Roderigo Borgia.

Had Savonarola been a man of the temperament and turn of mind which Luther had, or even had he lived fifty years later and in the northern part of Europe, there seems scarcely any doubt that he would have seceded from the corrupt Church of Rome altogether, instead of taking the course which he did. As it was, he chose the only other path which a lofty and honorable soul could adopt.

He said, "I cannot obey Roderigo Borgia, the man now calling himself Pope, because he is not the real head of the Church at all. He has bought the Chair of St. Peter's by bribery and paying

down immense sums of money, and he is accordingly a usurper there. I assume this position, and I denounce his excommunication as absolutely null and void. It carries no weight, for it is not an expression of the Church's authority, because Alexander VI. has no real authority to represent the Church."

This standpoint, while no doubt the true one, was very difficult ground to maintain, with the whole force of the Roman Church against him. It was an open question how long Savonarola could possibly hold out and prove himself stronger than the Pope.

A new tendency now began to manifest itself in the popular mind, even among his own friends—a demand that Savonarola should offer some proof, some credentials for his authority. Everywhere in Florence this point was discussed with intense interest and formed the chief topic for conversation wherever any number of citizens were assembled.

"If the Frate is a real prophet and a true servant of God," said many of his enemies and even some among his friends, "why does he not offer as a proof that he is in the right and the Pope altogether in the wrong some sign or testimony which will be indisputable and will clearly establish his innocence and honor? Surely God is as able in this day to defend his true children as he

was in the olden time and, if necessary, to work miracles for them."

"Tell us, Fra Girolamo," they cried, even as the Jews cried to Jesus Christ, "what sign showest thou? What dost thou work?"

This spirit manifest among the people, which made itself felt strongly on every side and in all ranks and classes of society, was perhaps the bitterest drop which Savonarola had yet tasted in the cup held to his lips.

While he believed most firmly in the miracles of the Bible, and even in the possibility that God might yet repeat such signs and wonders if it seemed necessary to his own wise purposes, yet he was very far from thinking it right to demand of the Almighty a sign or testimony to justify the credentials of a mere human being like himself.

He knew too, even as his divine Master had known when the people demanded of Him a sign from heaven, that this request was not made in the right spirit, but was prompted by the attitude of unbelief which desired in most cases not his justification, but his overthrow, that it was, indeed, a suggestion instigated by the originator of all evil himself.

Savonarola's mind was therefore at this time in a state of great perturbation and turmoil.

It was not that his faith in God and in his ultimate wisdom and justice ever faltered for one mo-

ment, but that he had largely lost that glad confidence in his own mission and destiny which had been so important and prominent a feature of his early work and life in Florence.

God was true and God was just, but had he, Savonarola, served him always with perfect truth and with perfect humility? If he had, would his life-work have proved such a sad failure as it now seemed, and would the people so largely fail to recognize as they were now doing how earnestly he had planned and worked for their welfare?

We can well believe that during these sad months the monk's greatest help and consolation were always found in study and meditation upon the last days of the life of his blessed Lord, and that in pondering on the ingratitude and ignominy heaped upon Christ's self-denying labors he found courage to bear a treatment so similiar and so disheartening.

Thus passed the first weeks of the year 1498, succeeding his Christmas sermon. Every day the people's clamor for "a sign, a miracle to show if the Frate be really what he claims or only an impostor," grew louder, and each time that Fra Girolamo preached to the great audiences which still assembled at San Marco he felt more strongly how difficult it was to know what he ought to do, and how terribly dangerous his position was becoming.

It is true that he still had a few strong men among the Piagnoni—noble, sensible men like Francesco Valori and Guido Salviati—who felt just as he did, that he had no right to ask or to expect a miracle worked in his favor, and that the suggestion truly emanated from the ranks of his enemies who desired to enclose him in a trap. But few minds of that generation were strong enough or wise enough to look at the situation in such a light. Many of his warmest friends, including even a number of his brother monks, were continually urging him to submit to some test, to offer some miraculous trial of his credentials which should surely establish them in the eyes of the Church and of the world.

“Do not fear,” cried many of the Dominicans, in their blind enthusiasm and desire that their Superior should take this step, “that God whom you have so nobly and faithfully served will desert you now. Only try him, and he will surely come to your rescue, and work some great miracle for you!”

And Savonarola replied many times in the true spirit of his Master, “Of what avail will it really be if I do make the experiment? And even if a miracle should be worked in my favor, do you think that they would any more readily believe in me or acknowledge my claims to justice? I tell you, my friends, that though in God’s good time

his cause will successfully triumph, the issue to me can be only one thing—death!”

But, as a wise and prudent leader, after long and patiently holding to the cause which he knows to be best, is sometimes finally swayed from it by the continued urging of weaker men, so Savonarola was at last persuaded to act in a way quite contrary to his better judgment.

Towards the end of February, 1498, a wooden balcony was erected for him above the great door of San Marco, and standing there before the vast crowds of people who filled the square below, Fra Girolamo asked for a miracle to prove him pure and clean in the sight of God. Taking in his hand that object most sacred in the eyes of all Roman Catholics, the crystal vessel containing the consecrated wafer, he raised it aloft in his hands and prayed aloud:

“O my God and Father, whom I have earnestly and faithfully ever tried to serve, and whose cause I have held dear above any earthly honor or possession, if thou now seest in my heart any base or ignoble motives, if thou judgest that I have not been thy true servant and humble follower, I ask that while I stand here in the sight of these people, thou wilt send down fire from heaven to consume me utterly!”

Of course no fire appeared, and the friar went slowly back into the church, leaving the crowd,

for the time being at least, somewhat silent and subdued.

The strain of that moment was a terrible one both for Savonarola and for his friends, but when it was over the Frate felt that he had made a great mistake in ever consenting to this trial. It was just as he had said it would be; the people were not really convinced by what he had done. The next day they laughed and scoffed, and said that this was no real miracle—it was only a negative test anyway! They wanted something more evident and positive, something which smacked of danger and excitement.

Hence it was most pleasing to the fickle people of Florence, who but two years before had been so entirely under Savonarola's guidance and for whom he had done so much, when a few weeks later one of the monks of the Franciscan order challenged the Dominican to a "Sperimento," or "Trial by Fire."

This was the revival of a very old custom which required that two champions should walk through fire, and the one who came out unharmed should be regarded as having proved himself innocent.

Fra Domenico, Girolamo's ever devoted friend and helper, a monk of loving and enthusiastic spirit, but not perhaps possessed of great wisdom or judgment, took up the challenge at once.

The Franciscans had probably hoped that Sa-

vonarola himself would accept it, and they no doubt desired in this way to bring about either his death, if he actually walked through the fire, or else his complete disfavor with the people if he declined to attempt it.

Fra Girolamo, however, saw through their motives clearly from the first, and was bitterly opposed to the whole scheme. It was some time before he would give his assent to Domenico's acceptance of the challenge, and even then, he did it reluctantly and against his better judgment.

Nearly the whole mass of the Florentines, however, both those who were friendly and those who were hostile, appeared greatly pleased at the idea of the Ordeal by Fire, and desired that it should without fail take place.

The friends of the Dominican wanted it, because most of them believed that God would perform a miracle for the sake of this noble and worthy child of his, and that if Fra Domenico came out of the flames unhurt the righteousness of Savonarola's cause would be surely established. In that case they felt that not only would all Florence be obliged to accept one so certified and attested by a sign as its guide and head, but even the Pope himself would be forced to withdraw the excommunication and to admit that the hated monk was really a teacher sent from God.

On the other hand, Savonarola's enemies, the

Campagnacci, who had always abhorred him, and the Franciscans, who were jealous because he had brought another order of friars into so much greater prominence and influence than their own, desired that the "Trial by Fire" should be carried out because they made sure that one of two things would then happen. Either Domenico would march into the flames and be consumed—for they had not the slightest idea that any miracle could occur—or from some cause or other at the last moment the whole performance might be stopped, and then the people would lay all the blame for their disappointment upon Fra Girolamo and visit their indignation upon his head.

As soon as the affair was finally arranged, and it was decided that the *Sperimento* should take place on the Friday before Palm Sunday, 1498, the excitement began to wax high among all Savonarola's devoted friends.

Not only did every Dominican of San Marco to a man offer himself as a champion to walk through the flames on behalf of this great leader, but many laymen among the *Piagnoni* took the same course. Savonarola could not but be comforted and strengthened by such devotion and loyalty on the part of his friends.

When the Ordeal was first proposed Bernardino was one of the most zealous advocates, and marvelled much that his father and mother did

not agree with him, but dampened his enthusiasm with sorrowful looks and gloomy forebodings. As the weeks passed, however, and the great day drew nearer, he found that his zeal was oozing away and the whole attitude of his mind changing. A deep depression seemed to settle down upon him, which he was quite unable to shake off. Something, he could never tell what, had vividly recalled to his mind the recollection of the night after the Bonfire of Vanities and of Fra Girolamo's terrible vision. Swiftly the certainty flashed across his boyish intelligence, "That vision was a forewarning of what is now about to take place! This Trial by Fire means nothing less than the Frate's own death, which was prophetically foreshadowed to him on that night, just as so many other events have been in the past."

When this thought had once suggested itself to Dino the conviction of its truth grew in intensity moment by moment until it became almost unendurable.

What made the matter worse was that he could not bring himself to speak about the subject to any one, not even to his mother. Not a word concerning that painful interview with the Frate two years ago had ever passed his lips, for he had felt it was a confidence too sacred to mention to another. Those were indeed unhappy days for the boy, and they passed slowly and sadly enough.

It was Thursday evening at last, and the Sperimento was appointed for the next day, Friday, when Dino decided that he could no longer silently bear his agony, and he made his way once more to his old place for consolation and comfort—the Frate's cell. Of late the lad had not dared to go there, for he was unwilling to add to the monk's weight of care and anxiety by relating his own perhaps foolish forebodings.

It was very evident that Fra Girolamo had missed his young friend by the eager way in which he met him, clasping both the outstretched hands in his and crying:

“Welcome, my Dino! You have indeed been a stranger here during these last few weeks.”

The boy looked up quickly into the strong, tender face which he loved so well, and then, his courage quite giving way, he broke into bitter weeping at the thought of this strange and terrible calamity which was so near and which he felt so powerless to prevent.

When he grew calmer, and the friar had begged him to tell what troubled him, he cried earnestly, and in a voice broken by sobs:

“Oh, dear Father, I do beseech of you to promise me that in some way or other you will find means to keep this dreadful Sperimento from taking place. During the past two weeks my mind has been continually filled with 'frightful appre-

hensions concerning it, and the more I have thought the more perfectly certain I have become that this occasion was the one shadowed forth in that terrible vision which came to you two years ago at Carnival-time and depressed you so greatly!"

Savonarola's rugged face clouded for a moment as he heard the boy's supplicating words, and then his grave blue eyes seemed to look solemnly out into the future, as if they could easily read all the destiny written there for him, while he answered slowly:

"No, my Bernardino, you are mistaken in this, —quite mistaken, I am sure. These apprehensions concerning the event fixed for to-morrow are needless and gloomy fears. In a certain sense it was quite natural that you should have had them, and to say the truth I have always blamed myself considerably that I ever informed you of the vision I had that night of the Bonfire of Vanities. I should have been strong enough, my child, to bear that trial alone, as God gave it to me only. But your sympathy was very sweet and comforting, and it was hard to resist the temptation to let you bear a share of the burden. Thank God, your buoyant nature has enabled you to cast off the impression of it until now, and I do not think the knowledge has really hurt you.

"But, my Dino, I am truly glad that you have

come to me with these unhappy anxieties about to-morrow, for I can certainly assure you that my vision did not apply to that occurrence at all. Indeed I can tell you more than that. It has been clearly shown to me that in God's good providence, the Sperimento will never take place at all."

"Thank God!" interjected the boy fervently, and his friend continued:

"What the actual cause which is to prevent it will be I do not clearly foresee, but this I do know, that some objection will arise on the side of the Franciscans, and for their own cowardly ends they will so arrange matters that the whole ceremony will fall through and the blame for its omission descend upon our shoulders.

"This, however, will all be as God ordains, and to him be the glory, for the Sperimento, I have always felt, was utterly wrong, and entering upon the undertaking a great mistake on our part.

"But Fra Domenico was so perfectly sure of success, and is still—loving heart that he is, he would gladly die for me a hundred times if it could set me right before the world!—that it seemed impossible utterly to oppose him and the whole force of public opinion which stood behind him.

"Now, Dino," Savonarola continued, "I want

you to dismiss this anxiety at once from your mind, and go home to a night of quiet rest."

"I will, dear Father!" cried the boy in his own cheerful tones. "But before I go, tell me one more thing, I pray you. Had that dreadful vision of yours then no meaning? Is it in truth a spectre which I may put out of my mind forever, and no longer continue to fear?"

No sooner had these words escaped him than the lad would have given all he possessed to call them back. For at his question a change came over Fra Girolamo. He began to tremble violently and his face grew white and drawn.

"Ah, my son," he cried in a sorrowful voice, "how little you mean to hurt me, and yet how little your young heart knows of all that is before us both! Poor boy! I would shield you from the sight and knowledge of what my vision really means if I could; but now I can only pray God that when the time comes he will give you strength to bear it. There will be no burning to-morrow, child, but, alas, there is to be another and far greater burning in Florence which will bring grief to many hearts. I thank God that just how soon or under just what circumstances it is to occur has as yet been mercifully hidden from my eyes!"

Having spoken these words with a solemn and yet a strong voice, Fra Girolamo fell on his knees, and leaning upon his desk buried his face between

his hands. Dino knelt beside him, and neither spoke for many moments. At length the friar raised his head and said quite naturally:

"God forgive me, my boy! I have again yielded to the impulse to confide in you more than I ought. Such burdens should not be laid upon your young shoulders. Do not let the thought of what I have said abide with you now, but cast it aside and trust that God will give us all power to endure his will in any event."

The Frate said these last words with a manner so calm and at the same time so cheerful that Dino took heart again, and looking up into his face begged his forgiveness for having spoken thoughtlessly.

"I might have known," he exclaimed remorsefully, "that I ought not to have questioned you more on such a subject. Now I will never speak of the matter again, and, please God, if anything dreadful *is* to happen, it may be far off in the future, and perhaps may even then not prove nearly so terrible as we have feared."

Thus speaking, the boy raised his face to the Frate again with a cheerful light in his dark eyes, and receiving his farewell salutation went home quite happily, comforted by the assurance that at least nothing awful was really to occur on the morrow.

Friday morning dawned clear and bright, and

very early were the preparations begun for the *Sperimento*.

In the great Piazza in front of the Palazzo della Signoria the Franciscan monks carefully constructed two long piles of firewood, kindlings and other inflammable materials, between which there was just room for the champions to walk when they made the test.

Soon the square was crowded with eager watchers, anticipating much pleasurable and perhaps some painful excitement from the promised spectacle.

Guido Salviati was there in his place as one of the Piagnone armed guard, of which five hundred were drawn up on one side, opposite to the five hundred Campagnacci on the other side of the Piazza.

Dino was there too, with his mother, who had insisted upon coming, but who was in a state of nervous terror from which her son vainly tried to rescue her by assurances that no one was really going into the fire and that all would yet be well.

After all the spectators had assembled there came the procession of Dominicans with Fra Domenico marching at its head wearing a scarlet cape and carrying the crucifix in his hand.

The Frate himself was one of the procession, and Dino was thankful to notice that the expression upon his face was as calm and peaceful as it

had been when he bade him farewell the evening before.

Then the Franciscans, headed by their champion, marched in and took their places.

All seemed to be in readiness for the promised ceremonies, and the crowd began to grow impatient, as after they had waited some time, there was still no sign that the ordeal was to begin. Evidently something had gone wrong, for the leaders of the two monkish orders appeared to be in continued conversation and violent discussions ensued.

The truth was that, just as Savonarola had foreseen, the Franciscans from the beginning never intended that any Trial by Fire should be permitted. They had no notion whatever of allowing their champion to run any risk of even so much as singeing his garments, and of course they knew that if Fra Domenico once entered the flame he also would be forced to do so. The people wanted fair play in the matter, and would certainly insist upon equal danger being faced by each champion. Hence, as they could not really jeopardize the life of either monk, they saw that their only hope lay in defeating the whole scheme of the Sperimento and making it appear that the blame for its failure should rest upon the Frate's shoulders.

The first objection arose when Fra Domenico

appeared ready to enter the glowing pathway between the piles of fagots with the crucifix in his hands.

"That cannot possibly be allowed!" cried the Superior of the Franciscans.

Savonarola then removed the crucifix from his brother monk's hands, and placed in them, instead, the sacred vessel containing the Host.

At this the Franciscans set up a still louder outcry, saying that such sacrilege could never be permitted. The Signoria were all on the side of the Franciscans and supported them in their endless wrangling and opposition until hours had been thus passed in weary strife and bickering.

Fra Girolamo was perhaps the only person in that whole crowded Piazza who remained throughout the tiresome day calm and undisturbed.

Guido Salviati, who stood near him much of the time, noticed a far-away look in his eyes which he had never seen there before. The cloud which for weeks past had rested upon him, and had often furrowed his brow with tense lines of anxiety, seemed to have lifted from his heart. He was evidently not dwelling upon the petty worries of this harassing day, but was looking far beyond them to something infinitely more important.

Thus the strange day wore on, and ever the disappointment and disgust of the assembled mul-

itude became more apparent as the certainty dawned upon them that no Ordeal by Fire was to take place after all. Dino could hear on every side hisses and groans for Savonarola, and execrations of the pestilent friar who had brought so much trouble on Florence already and who was really at the bottom of every misfortune.

Bitterness was in the boy's heart as he recognized that some of the very men who were now calling down maledictions upon his beloved friend had two years before been among his most active partisans and had esteemed him the greatest of leaders and reformers.

Toward the middle of the afternoon Maria Salviati's strength, which had been failing under the terrible strain, gave way utterly, and Bernardino was obliged with the help of two servants who had accompanied them to carry her home in a half-fainting condition.

When she had been revived and grown somewhat calmer Dino thought of himself for the first time and took some food, for he was exhausted and very hungry.

At first he determined that he would return to the Piazza, but after a little consideration decided not to do so. The fatigue and anxiety had told upon him, and again the terrible depression thrown off by his interview of the evening before with the Frate settled down upon his spirit.

Kneeling beside his bed in his own room, he tried to seek comfort in prayer, but was too utterly weary to find words, and in a few moments the boy was fast asleep.

The first sound which smote upon his drowsy senses, and brought him back to half consciousness, was the noise of pelting rain upon his window.

Instantly his awakening mind recurred to the events of the day, and he knew that the excitement must now be at an end, for of course the people would perceive that the sudden thunderstorm precluded any possibility of lighting a fire with the rain-soaked fagots and brushwood.

"Thank God!" cried Dino fervently. "The danger is over at last!"

But even as he spoke he heard in the street beneath his window a sound as of troops marching and the clanking of spear and sword, and then the loud shouting of an infuriated mob surrounding and pursuing them.

Leaning out in the heavy rain, he looked down and saw the Piagnone guard, his own father amongst them, marching grimly and swiftly back to San Marco, formed into a hollow square, in whose centre they had placed Fra Girolamo.

It evidently needed all their strength and courage to keep him there and to protect him, for all about their ranks, hurling missiles against them

and surging close up, as if endeavoring to break through the protecting lines, was an angry multitude apparently anxious to tear in pieces, if it might have its way, that patient figure who for eight years had lived and suffered among them.

"The Frate!—to the fire with the Frate!" shouted some. Others cried, "Send him to the Pope! Put him out of the city! Away with him! We will not have this man trying to rule Florence any longer! Curses upon the Dominican! Down with Fra Girolamo! Viva il Papa! Long live the Borgia!"

And Dino, as he sadly closed the window, shutting out the pelting hurricane but not the sound of those mocking voices, could not help remembering how another jeering multitude had cried many centuries before in Jerusalem, as they insulted Fra Girolamo's divine Master, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live! Crucify him! We will not have this man to rule over us! We have no king but Cæsar!"

VI

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM

PALM SUNDAY passed peacefully, a still bright day which seemed like a sort of oasis in a weary desert, a brief respite between two fierce tempests. It was the calm before a storm.

Fra Girolamo preached again to his people in the morning, and though it is hardly probable that they realized he was speaking to them for the last time, yet there was in his manner so much of pathetic tenderness and of patient fortitude that many who heard his sermon were filled with premonitions that the Frate was giving his final message and that the moment of his departure was approaching.

It seemed, however, as the quiet hours of the day drew on, that the turbulent spirit evoked by Friday's events had largely been subdued in the people of Florence. There was no noise or confusion upon the streets, and apparently the Campagnacci were all quietly in their homes, without thought of further mischief.

Just at sunset, and a short time before the hour for the evening service, Bernardino Salviati left his home and went to San Marco again to talk

for a little with the Frate. Over the city there seemed to hang a strange stillness as it lay in the sunset glow, its glistening campaniles and graceful towers lit up by the level rays. The motionless atmosphere appeared to Dino almost portentous, like the hush which sometimes precedes a violent hurricane of wind and rain. He tried to rid himself of the feeling however, and hurrying through the long cloisters and corridors, reached at last Savonarola's familiar cell.

The monk was there as usual, seated quietly before his desk, but he did not seem to be either writing or praying.

As the boy entered he looked up smiling, but there was still in his eyes that far-away, expectant gaze which Dino had noticed on the Friday before. Yet he was peaceful, and even cheerful, though he did not seem inclined to talk as much as usual.

Bernardino at once broached the matter for which he had specially come that evening and of which his mind was very full.

"Father," he cried eagerly, "I have been thinking all day of a plan which I want you to promise me that you will try to adopt. Since Friday evening it has come clearly to my mind that you ought not to remain any longer in Florence. At present there is a cessation of hostility and the people seem quiet, but this symptom is in truth an alarm-

ing one, for it is only a lull between two successive bursts of tempest.

"Now, however, is our opportunity and the time for you to depart from the city. If you will consent to let a few picked men from the Piagnone guard escort you, I am quite sure my father can manage it to-night, and before to-morrow morning dawns we can carry you safely far beyond the boundaries of Florence and into some mountain retreat where you can remain safely until this storm of popular fury has expended itself."

Bernardino paused expectant of some sign that the monk approved of his plan, but Fra Girolamo looked at him with a sad smile and shook his head gently.

"You are, my Dino, as always, most thoughtful for me and wise, too, beyond your years," he said. "This plan might have proved a good one and it could possibly have been carried out several months ago. But if you will consider a few moments I think that even your enthusiastic spirit must perceive how in the light of recent events it would seem utterly impossible. Do you think, my son, even if I allowed your father and his brave comrades to risk their lives for my sake, that the people would permit me to escape them in this way? It is quite as you say; they are calm now, but it is the preternatural calm of the wild

beast who is meditating another furious spring upon his prey. They will rouse themselves again shortly, perhaps this very night, and this time I know certainly that they will be successful in compassing my death.

"But even, Dino, supposing that I could leave the city and find a temporary shelter among the hills, how long do you think it could be maintained? You must remember, my boy, that I am nothing but an excommunicated, renegade monk now, under the papal ban—that almost the whole world is against me except you and a few other faithful souls. To the confines of Italy and far beyond them the Borgia's hatred would pursue me and I could not possibly escape it.

"No, my child, do not try to persuade me to leave Florence, for if I must die it were far better to perish here among my friends for whom I have labored—even among my enemies, who were once friends and whom I still love tenderly—than to die afar off in some foreign land at the hands of that cruel monster who occupies the chair of St. Peter!"

Dino listened to this reply with a troubled countenance and with his dark eyes full of tears. Kneeling at the Frate's side he was about to press his suit still further, though it seemed well nigh hopeless, when upon the peaceful silence of the convent there rose the sound of a hoarse distant

roar—the sound of many voices shouting together and the continuous tramp of marching feet.

A strange, unearthly light came into the Frate's blue eyes. Lifting his head he listened, and then said calmly, "Behold, my Dino, it is as I told you—the storm is about to break!"

Bernardino Salviati never had a very clear or consecutive impression of the succeeding events of that night. He knew that the Frate rose at once and that they went together through the convent-halls and into the church, where Fra Girolamo at once assembled all the monks and where he awaited, leading them in a service of prayer, the tumult which was so fast approaching.

It soon appeared that the Campagnacci had been at work again throughout the city, and that they had collected a vast mob, many of them armed and many others carrying blazing torches.

The kneeling monks were shortly able to distinguish the words which they cried as they rushed madly onward:

"To San Marco—the fire to San Marco! We will burn the friar in his cell! Down with the convent—we will roast him alive and then send his bones to Alexander! Open the doors and let us in, or we will murder every Dominican of you all!"

These menaces were accompanied by vile curses,

and as the monks, aware of their danger, had securely barred and fastened the great portals of the convent, the crowd immediately applied their torches to them and burst in hotly, while the whole place was filled with thick clouds of smoke and with infuriated human beings.

But the brave Dominican monks and novices were by no means going to surrender their beloved leader without a fierce struggle. Some of the young Piagnone nobles too, many of whom like Bernardino Salviati had in time past been proud to call themselves Savonarola's "angels," being somehow forewarned of what was about to occur, had hurried by short cuts and byways to the convent and had succeeded in getting into it before the mob arrived. A few of these were armed, and in spite of Fra Girolamo's protest, they fought fiercely.

Many of the younger monks and novices also armed themselves with whatever they could lay hands upon. Some of them snatched the heavy gilded wooden crosses from the altars for weapons, and we are told that they did indeed look like avenging *angels* as in their white robes, and with holy indignation in their noble faces, they swept down upon the powers of darkness which were invading those consecrated precincts.

Bernardino was among the most zealous of the defenders, and heedless of the Frate's beseeching

cry, "My children, let them take me at once! My life is not worth such a sacrifice as this!" he and his comrades beat back the invaders and finally drove them temporarily out of the convent.

But as the boy dealt blow after blow upon his enemies, exerting to the utmost his young strength, he was suddenly conscious of a swift, sharp pain through his shoulder, and wondering what caused it, did not realize for a moment that he had been severely wounded by a spear-thrust.

The stream of blood which issued from beneath his tunic, however, made him pause, and then his companions bore him, half swooning, back into the church and laid him down near the altar where a number of others who had been injured were already lying.

Savonarola was going tenderly from one to another, skillfully binding up wounds with his swift, slender fingers, and to those who were evidently past help administering the last consolations of the Church. When he saw how Dino was hurt a groan broke from his trembling lips. "Oh, my son, this is the bitterest drop of all!" he cried, and then, bending, he quickly began to loosen the boy's clothing and to bind up the wound, which, though serious, did not seem to be one endangering his life.

The flow of blood was soon stanchd, and the Frate, greatly comforted, was thanking God that

Dino's injury was not vital, when two monks entered bearing in their arms another wounded lad and laid him down before Fra Girolamo.

It was Pietro Panciatici, a dear friend and comrade of Bernardino's and a lad of about his own age. He had ever been an enthusiastic Piagnone, and one of the Frate's most devoted "angels."

It was very evident to the most casual onlooker that he was near death, but in his great dark eyes a look hovered so unconscious of pain and so radiantly beatific that all were startled.

Savonarola went to Pietro at once and administered extreme unction. His emotion was great as he did so, for he had loved the boy tenderly and he felt now that the young life was given instead of his.

But an old chronicler tells us that the dying Panciatici looked up into the monk's well-beloved face with a smile of delight and of gratitude, crying, "This is indeed blessed, dear Father, to die for you! Never in my life have I been so happy as at this moment!"

With these words his pure young spirit passed away, and Savonarola knelt beside the noble lad weeping.

But the Frate was not even allowed to mourn his best friends in peace, for during the lull which had followed the last onslaught of the Campagnacci there came from the Signoria a deputation

who begged that the Frate would consent to leave San Marco and accompany them at once to the Palazzo Vecchio. They insisted that this was the only way by which the convent could be saved from further attack and they promised faithfully that the Frate should be soon brought safely home again. In this latter promise it was impossible that any one who knew the state of popular feeling could put much confidence.

Fra Girolamo did not hesitate, however. He was glad to save his followers from further risk and danger and he felt that to sacrifice any more lives of those so dear to him was far worse than death itself.

He first calmly and even cheerfully went to each one of his wounded friends, including Dino, and bade them good-by, saying not to fear for him, as the Signoria had promised to protect him.

Dino was by this time in a half-conscious state, for though the bleeding had stopped his shoulder was exceedingly painful, and being greatly weakened by the quantity of blood lost and also by intense excitement, he was beginning to grow feverish. So he hardly realized how important and terrible were the events which were taking place, and this was indeed a merciful thing for him.

The Frate then assembled as many of his brother-monks as possible in the great library

and addressed to them most touching farewell words in Latin, exhorting them whatever happened to remain faithful to the simple truth as he had ever tried to teach it to them, and to believe that God did all things according to the highest wisdom and justice.

He then withdrew into a smaller adjoining room, where he confessed to Fra Domenico and received from him the Sacrament. After this he kissed each one of the monks, and then announced himself fully ready to depart. It was about nine o'clock by this time, and the whole exciting affray had lasted probably less than two hours.

Together Fra Girolamo and Fra Domenico went out, the former with his hands tied behind his back, into the dark streets, which were filled with a howling, jeering crowd of their bitterest enemies.

Dino, lying still on the altar-steps in the church, heard dimly the wild shouts and derisive taunts which greeted their appearance, and then he remembered clearly no more that happened until he found himself at home, whither several of his comrades had borne him after quiet was restored in the streets, lying upon his own familiar bed and with his dear mother's face bending tenderly over him.

Bernardino's wound turned out to be a much

more serious affair than it had at first seemed. The feverish conditions increased greatly, and the boy was in a state of semi-stupor, out of which it seemed scarcely possible that he would ever rally, for more than a month.

Those were, indeed, sad and terrible weeks for Guido and Maria Salviati and the effect of them remained as a dark shadow over all their subsequent lives. Not only was their well-beloved child lying very near to the boundaries between life and death, so that it seemed as if at any moment he might cross into the unknown world, but their revered and adored Frate, the leader and the friend who had done so much for them and so much for the world, was undergoing in the Palazzo Vecchio a treatment at the hands of the Signoria so horrible and so scandalous that human nature recoils at the thought of it.

Having now utterly abandoned all restraining principle and every idea of honor which they might have once possessed, the Government of Florence allowed a corrupt council of sixteen citizens to try Savonarola. Among this number were many of his most implacable enemies, one of them being Dolfo Spini himself.

We would not dwell upon the terrible tortures which the brave monk endured, nor upon the lonely moments which he spent, in great pain of both body and mind, in that little chamber, the

Alberghettino, high up in the "Rocca" which hangs so far aloft in the air above the city, the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio.

But the loving hearts who had trusted Fra Girolamo so long and so absolutely could have borne even that with patience—could have endured to know that great as the sufferings of his body might be his cruel enemies could not touch his dauntless spirit, which would soon escape from their hands and return to the God who created it—had not those same fiendish torturers resorted to a method even more malicious and more debased.

Not content with using every effort to make the monk confess upon the rack that he was an impostor, that all his claims to be a true teacher and a true servant of God were false and worthless, they gave out to the world, instead of the friar's veritable words, a collection of absolutely lying records which were, alas, believed for the time being by many of his friends in Florence.

It is indeed possible that the great soul, in a delirium of pain, may have had forced from it some words like these: "I will confess that I have not founded all my predictions of future events upon direct divine revelation but upon my own opinion, founded, however, always upon a thorough study of the Holy Scripture."

That he said even so much as this is not, however, at present certain, for the records have been



THE "ROCCA" TOWER, WHERE SAVONAROLA WAS
IMPRISONED.

so entirely falsified that there is no confidence to be placed in them.

What is very certain, however, is that the Signoria were forced to send a message like this to the Pope, which scarcely seems to imply that they felt themselves to have succeeded adequately in the process of torturing their noble victim:

"We have had to deal with a man of the most extraordinary patience of body and wisdom of soul, who hardened himself against all torture and from whom we could scarcely extract anything which he wished to conceal from us."

Had Maria and Guido Salviati known then all that we know now, the six weeks of Savonarola's imprisonment would have been comparatively easy for them to bear. But when the false "Confession" was published it was difficult for any one to tell just how much of it could be believed and how much was certainly untrue in this complicated tissue of lies. The weak populace of Florence hailed the "Confession" with delight.

"Now," they cried, "the Frate has acknowledged that he never was what he pretended to be—a teacher sent by God; that he never had any revelations of God's will made to him or any foreknowledge of things which were to happen. Let us put this impostor to death just as quickly as we can, for there is no doubt that it is he who has brought all these troubles upon unhappy Florence,

and if we get rid of him we shall certainly have prosperous times again!"

But not his enemies alone were deceived by the document. Even the Dominicans of San Marco, to their everlasting shame and disgrace, now failed their great leader in his hour of deepest need, just as the disciples failed the Master in his darkest moments: "They all forsook Him and fled!"

When these monks who had loved and trusted their Superior during so many years read the published retraction of his claims, they, strange to say, believed it, and immediately in a body sent in their submission to the Pope.

Considering the weakness and baseness of human nature, thus testified to in so many ways, we can scarcely regard it as strange that during those dark days there were few even among the Piagnoni who dared to say boldly, "We will not believe that our leader and friend ever said any of these strange and unnatural words. It is evident that these reports have been infamously tampered with, and the character of the men who made them out is such as to inspire absolutely no belief. Is not Dolfo Spini himself one of the Sixteen who have put our Frate to the torture, and is not he a fiend rather than a human being? If then some of this document is false, we have no sufficient proof that all of it may not be, and until

such proof is forthcoming we will never believe in Fra Girolamo's condemnation of himself!"

There were, it is true, comparatively few of the Piagnoni who were strong enough to assume this position, but of those few Maria Salviati was one. Even her husband passed through that terrible time in an agony of doubt and dismay, but his wife held up her head bravely and was even cheerful as she tended her sick boy. To her to believe was easy—to doubt a complete impossibility. She could no more have thought the Frate capable of deceit or of imposture than she could have dreamed the sun might go out in midnight blackness at noonday.

Often she said to Guido, "Why are you so cast down, my husband? Do not put any trust in these assertions of the Sixteen that Fra Girolamo has really said what they claim! Do you expect that a devoted and faithful servant will have any better treatment than his Lord and Master received at the hands of wicked men? Has human nature changed for the better, think you, since the days when they tortured and insulted the Lord Jesus by putting on him the crown of thorns and buffeting him with their hands? No, rather, I consider that it has grown worse, for against how much more light are the Florentines sinning than was had by the Jews!

"Savonarola is suffering cruelly, and I am sure

that he must die, but he will die a conqueror. God will never leave his servant alone in this hour of his deepest need, and some day these so-called 'confessions' will surely be shown to be false!"

Thus Maria's brave soul refused to be dejected or cast down, and Bernardino, seeing his mother's bright face, guessed very little of the sad events which were taking place. He was too weak and ill to comprehend fully what had happened, but he did know that the Frate was imprisoned and that his trial was soon to take place. Of the cruel tortures and of the published "confession" he never heard until all was over, so there was nothing to hinder the gradual return of his strength which came as his wound healed.

Meanwhile, after much wrangling between the Pope and the Signoria as to which should have the supreme privilege of putting to death one of the noblest men who has ever lived upon this earth, it was finally decided that Savonarola should not be delivered up into the hands of Alexander VI., as the latter had so much desired, but should be publicly hung, and then his body burned in the great Piazza della Signoria, May 23, 1498.

No taint of suspicion had even during this terrible trial ever been breathed against the monk's moral character, and even his enemies were obliged to acknowledge that there was no just cause why

he should be put to death. He had, indeed, refused to acknowledge the Pope's power to excommunicate him, and he had declared many times in unmistakable terms what he thought of Alexander's character. This really was his only crime, and the war between him and the Borgia was one which, in any event, must have inevitably become a death-struggle.

It was the war which has existed in all ages and times between the powers of light and of darkness, between Michael and Satan, between Jesus Christ and the devil! In this case, as often before, the baser elements of human nature seemed for a time to gain absolute sway, to completely triumph over the cause of purity and justice. But it was only for a time, and Savonarola did not suffer in vain.

Meanwhile, between the periods of his cruel torture the great soul was allowed several weeks of respite, and there in his little prison cell high up in the lofty tower he employed himself in writing two beautiful and trustful meditations, one upon the Fifty-first and the other upon the Thirty-first Psalm.

He was now sure that his cause was lost and that his life-mission had in many respects been a total failure. All that he had suffered and done for Florence seemed quite unappreciated, and there were few even of those who loved him who

could still believe in him fully. But God was upon his throne and in the end light would succeed the darkness, truth would triumph over error. If Florence was never to be God's city, never to become the place where Jesus Christ was supremely honored, there was yet to be, for all believing souls and all redeemed sinners, a Holy City into which there should not enter anything that worketh abomination or maketh a lie. Only those written in the Lamb's Book of Life should dwell in that Holy City, and Savonarola knew that his name was inscribed on those shining pages and his title was clear to a mansion in that eternal dwelling-place.

Therefore the racked body endured as seeing Him who is invisible, and the tortured spirit looked far on to the endless years which it should spend with God. Those who suffer greatly in a true cause have always certain mighty compensations which are not reckoned up to them by ordinary judgment, and of these we cannot doubt that Savonarola possessed more than the usual share.

If in his prison cell there were not vouchsafed to him any of those ecstatic visions and rapturous revelations which had visited him in the past, we may feel sure that the God of all comfort wrapped his torn yet trusting servant about with a peace which nothing could really disturb, with a strong confidence which no venomous darts could pierce.

So the Easter-tide, with its joyous associations, passed sorrowfully away in Florence. April was gone, and it was the nineteenth of May when two Papal Commissioners arrived from Alexander VI., and complete arrangements were made between them and the Committee of Sixteen for the public execution to take place on the twenty-third.

After the arrival of these Papal Legates, Savonarola was again cruelly tortured for three days, seemingly this time as the result of pure devilish malice, for why make him suffer further when he was so soon to die?

Fra Domenico and also Fra Silvestro—another Dominican monk, who was a much less exalted character than his two stronger brethren, but who by his courage and nobility at the last proved himself worthy to suffer with them—were all condemned to the same death. This sentence was communicated to each one of the prisoners on the night of May twenty-second, and they were told that it was to be their last night on earth.

By a singular arrangement the three doomed brethren, who had been kept in solitary confinement for the preceding six weeks, were allowed once more to see each other and to have their last meeting in the great hall of the Consiglio Maggiore.

It must have been with peculiar feelings that Savonarola entered this apartment. For the hall had been built only a few years before by his advice and at the very height of his popularity, and he had hoped great things for Florence's well-being from the assemblies of true and noble men who should meet there and make wise laws for the people. Now all these hopes had perished forever. Florence was to-morrow to put him to death, after having offered to him every insult and degradation which could be heaped upon a human soul and human body.

No comfortable resting-place was provided for those weary prisoners on that last sad night, and we are told that the only way in which Savonarola, after he had embraced and blessed the two monks whom he was so glad to see once more, could find an interval of rest was through the kindness of a Penitent Friar named Nicolini. This good man remained with him all night, and, sitting down on the floor, contrived to make a comfortable support for the Frate's head upon his knees.

Like a tired child the patient martyr slept thus for some time, and God must have sent to him tender and comforting visions, for Fra Nicolini tells us that he smiled many times sweetly in his sleep. When he awoke he thanked his friend for his kindness with that same gentle gratitude which he had ever evinced for small favors. Then he confessed

for the last time to the Penitent Friar and received the Holy Communion, thus preparing himself for the fast-approaching ordeal.

Bernardino Salviati had up to almost the last moment remained quite ignorant of the actual state of affairs in Florence, but on the day preceding the execution his soul seemed overwhelmed by a certainty that some awful occurrence was close at hand and he forced from his mother's lips the whole truth.

He was still very weak and his wound was not fully healed, but when he announced firmly his intention of being present at the Frate's death on the morrow, neither of his parents felt that they dared to assume the responsibility of refusing their consent. For there was in Dino's white, set face an expression that told them how vain it would be to oppose him, and how this last sight of his beloved friend would perhaps be more to him than any other comfort which remained in life.

The distance was not great from the Salviati palace to the Piazza, but it seemed very far to those three who trod it together on that beautiful May morning. Dino walked slowly, leaning hard upon his father's arm, and his mother followed them sorrowfully.

The large square was already thronged with

people when they reached it, and it was difficult to force a passage through the crowd. But Bernardino had a plan which he was intensely desirous of carrying out, and his father had promised to help him by every means in his power. It was to traverse the square and reach a place as near as possible to the door of the Palazzo Vecchio, so that he might be very close to the Frate when he appeared.

Rather to Guido's surprise they were able to attain this end quite easily. True there were some insulting remarks which reached their ears about the "white-faced Piagnone" and the "Frate's Angel," but on the whole the people seemed to be really touched with pity by Bernardino's weakness and his pale look of utterly despairing grief.

Several times men stepped aside with a respectful gesture, giving up their places to him, that he might get a few steps nearer, and more than once sympathetic remarks reached his ear—"Poor child, this sight will kill him! The boy is about to die too; let him see his friend, the Frate, once again in this world!"

At last the three were standing in a position where Dino could almost touch with his hand the monks who were about to issue through the doorway, and from that to pass down the long wooden platform, at the end of which was erected the gib-

bet with three halters upon it and the great heap of fuel underneath.

And now there arose from within the palace a confused murmur of voices and then the sound of footsteps approaching. Bernardino's brain was reeling, but he did not lose consciousness. Only one thing he saw clearly, and that was the face of Fra Girolamo very near to him—a face altered by suffering, its strong lines made sharper and more rugged from lack of proper food and sleepless nights, yet with that same exalted look upon it which he had noticed there the last time he had seen it—on that night six weeks ago when they had talked together for the last time upon this earth.

Now the thought uppermost in the boy's mind was whether the monk would see and recognize him. If he could only have one more look from those deep blue eyes which he loved so well he would not ask for a single spoken word; the lad thought that he could bear all the rest with patience!

Fra Girolamo's lips were moving, and quite distinctly though very low there fell from them the syllables of the Creed which he was calmly repeating.

The Frate was close to him now—the supreme moment had come; would he go by without a glance of recognition?

But suddenly, as if arrested by some electric shock which seemed passing from Bernardino's mind to his, the Frate's eyes, which had been uplifted, looked right down into the lad's own. Then a swift, startling change passed over the thin face, as when a burst of sunlight irradiates some still and sombre lake which has lain in the shadow of a dark cloud.

Savonarola smiled, and his last sweet smile upon earth was given to his boy friend. Then he spoke naturally and calmly, though very low—"You here, my Dino? Thank God that I see you once again!"

It seemed as if he wished to say more, but the moment was over, and the escorting soldiers hurried him on to the platform where were awaiting him the three tribunals which were to pronounce his sentence.

The happiness of that moment was indeed a mighty compensation, sufficient to cheer and comfort Bernardino Salviati in many dark hours through the remainder of his life. But its immediate result was, as might have been expected, far too much for his weakened physical condition and excited brain. Merciful nature came to the rescue, for the boy fainted and remained in a state of semi-stupor long after he had been carried home by his parents and put to bed again.

The mental strain and the great exertion

which he had made caused a return of feverish conditions, and it was many weeks before Bernardino fully recovered and was able to bear any talk concerning the events of that day.

The rest of the great tragedy it was well that he should not have seen or been obliged to remember; yet the knowledge of the way in which Savonarola's noble heart met its fate, though a dark one, was full of profit and inspiration for those who venerated his memory, and months afterwards Dino insisted upon hearing from his mother a full account in every particular of that which took place.

As the Frate stood before the first of the three tribunals which were to carry out his sentence, and as he was shorn of his Dominican robes and degraded from his rank as priest, the Bishop who performed this office declared him to be separated from the Church militant and the Church triumphant. But the gentle voice of the martyr friar rebuked him, saying quietly, "From the Church militant—yes, but from the Church triumphant—no; that is not yours to do!"

From the Bishop's tribunal the monk passed on with his two companions to that of the Papal Commissaries, who pronounced the three heretics and schismatics, and then to the third and last tribunal, where the Florentine officials uttered the final sentence of death.

Savonarola met his death in silence, and though when he had ascended the ladder he stood for a moment and looked calmly at the multitude, there was probably in his mind no thought and no desire of attempting any speech to them.

What, indeed, should he have said to that cruel, mocking crowd? What was there left for him to say, except, perhaps, the words of his dying Master: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

But though he did not speak, it seems likely to those acquainted with his character that his heart was breathing that same prayer, and that his last thought was a longing for the peace and prosperity of the city which had so ill-treated him.

We cannot refrain from quoting, as we close the story of Savonarola's last moments, that very noble and graceful tribute to the great Dominican's undying fame which Mrs. Oliphant has so happily rendered in her "Makers of Florence":

"Florence learned after he was gone that her only chance for freedom lay in taking up again and following the system he had instituted; but did it, one is almost glad to know, too late; and so fell under the hated sway of the Medici, and out of one tyranny into another till recent events have given her back a better existence.

"The faithful in Florence kept up a secret memory of the martyrs as long as there remained a

Piagnone in the city, and strewed flowers in the stony square where Savonarola died, and burned lamps before his picture in their homes.

"His shadow lies across the sunny squares and streets of Florence and consecrates alike the little cell in San Marco, and the little prison in the tower, and the great hall built for his great Council, which, in a beautiful, poetical justice, received the first Italian Parliament, a greater council still.

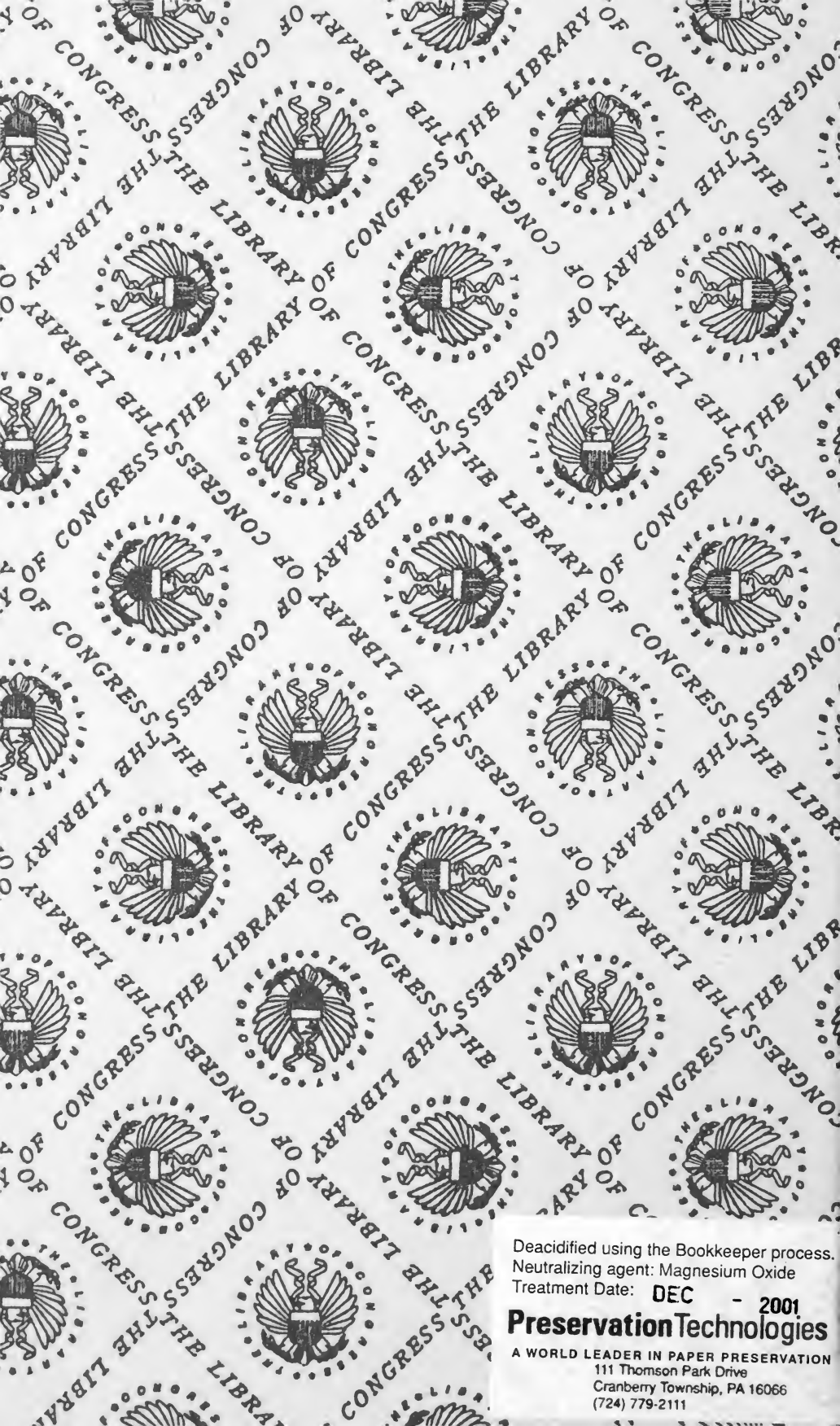
"Thus, only four hundred years too late, his noble patriotism had its reward."

If any shall say that this story is too sad a one for us to have lingered over, we would reply that no life is really sad which ends in spiritual victory and the influence of which extends down the ages for the enriching and profiting of many successive generations, as has that of the great monk Fra Girolamo Savonarola.

Savonarola and Fra Domenico and Dino and their brave Piagnone friends have now been for over four hundred years in the beautiful Country where there is no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; and if they could communicate with us now they would surely tell us that all the pain and grief of their lives upon earth were not things to be regretted, but that it was worth while to have borne the cross for their blessed Lord and King, and drunk the cup of woe that they might follow

in his train—that the cross-bearing is amply repaid by the crown-wearing!

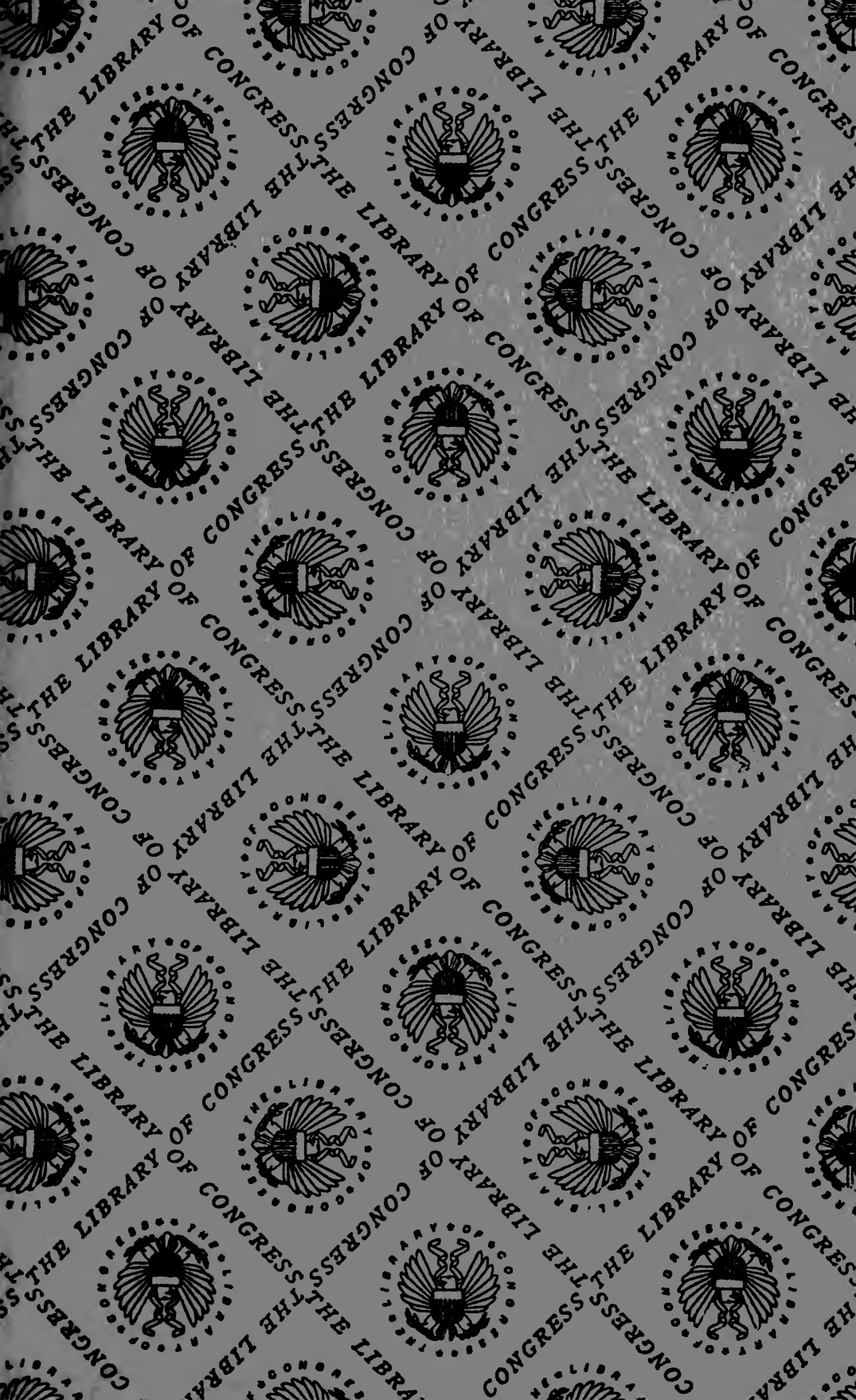
And if our lives are made stronger and nobler by contemplating these events which occurred so long ago in Florence, another proof will be given that beautiful deeds and high endeavors continue to bring forth fruit through all succeeding ages in the beneficent influence which never ceases to follow the knowledge of them.



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